Tempest

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Tempest

by justheretoreadhannibalfics

Summary

Will Graham was kidnapped right out of college, and spent years in the service of the family as a lie detector. After years of abuse and mistreatment, Will gets sick of it and decides to mix things up by lying about the intentions of one of their business partners.

That's the decision that puts him in line to meet one Doctor Hannibal Lecter. A plastic surgeon with questionable morals and a penchant to communicate through quotations.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

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The light shone in, blinding Will momentarily. He blinked, shying away from the door and anticipating shouting and violence. The men had not been kind to him since he tried to get them to give him a better position in the organization.

He had thought it would work. They were just using him as basically a lie detector, ratting out any associates that were lying or planning to rebel. He had told them it would be an easy thing to lie to them and allow them to be overthrown in order to free himself of them. He had asked for better accommodations in return for his honesty.

That had earned him this cell, where he stayed until they needed him. He was beaten before being brought out, and given only small amounts of food and water between. He was not strong enough to betray them, or so they thought.

The last time he had been asked to confer on the Vergers, he had seen that they planned to take over the operations. He had seen it in their eyes, and had decided to make his move. He had sworn on his life that they had only good intentions toward the family.

He had never been given a name to refer to his captors, other than the family.

Will had been in the cell for several weeks after that, and he was sure it hadn't worked. Maybe he was being punished further because they found out he had lied.

"Well, hello there," came a voice through the door.

Will could see a figure standing in the light, but his eyes were not adjusting quickly enough for him to make out who it might be. He recognized the voice, but he only had to have heard it once before for that, so it wasn't much of a reference point.

Will didn't answer the voice, knowing it could be met with blows depending on which of the brutes it was. He just kept his eyes on their legs and waited for the inevitable.

"I hear you are quite the asset for business," the voice continued, drawing nearer, but not close enough for them to strike him, "aside from the fact that you were mistaken about my dealings."

Then, Will recognized who it was. It was Mason Verger himself. The man who ran the entire Verger enterprise. He must have overthrown the family, and was here sifting through the spoils.

Will had to make himself valuable to the man and the entire group. If he wasn't useful, he would die.

"I wasn't mistaken," Will replied, tilting his chin up and looking the man in the face, which was growing more defined as his eyes grew used to the light, "I lied so my captors would

learn their lesson. I was sick of being treated like an animal. I thought anything would be better than them. Even you, Mason."

Mason grinned, evidently pleased by that. He beckoned for a few of his men to come, and they lifted Will to his feet, each keeping one hand on his shoulder in case he should try anything. Not that he would, being as malnourished and small statured as he was.

"You have spunk," Mason declared, "What's your name?"

Will stood as tall as he could, holding on to any dignity he could find despite his position.

"Will Graham. I have degrees in Psychology and Forensics. I also have an empathy disorder, making it so I can tell when anyone is lying, and what anyone's intentions are. That's what got me here in the first place."

Mason nodded, still smiling.

"Well, mister Graham. I think you could be of use to me. No one has been able to make a move against the family for the last year, and I have a feeling you are the key to their success. I'd guess the only reason I managed to take them out was because of your little trick you played on them. Bruist didn't know he was playing with fire until he was burned. I will not make the same mistake."

Will wasn't sure how that boded for himself, but it didn't sound like Mason intended to kill him, so he supposed that was good. He would live to maybe make another attempt at escape. Every day he was alive and capable of his own thoughts was a victory.

"Very well," Mason said, clapping with finality, "Men, take him back home. I want him treated as a guest until I decide otherwise. Tell Cordell to prepare something special for dinner. Mister Graham and I are going to have a conversation."

The men each nodded sharply and pushed against Will's shoulders so he stepped forward, walking where they steered him. He was compliant, having no reason to fight just yet. Being a prisoner who was allowed to see the light, and eat food, and walk untethered, was better than what he had dealt with to that point, and he would take it as long as he must.

Will was placed in the back of a van with darkened back windows. It was reminiscent of one he had seen animal control use once, and it made him want to grimace. He didn't like the idea of being treated like an animal, but he knew it could be worse.

There were no seatbelts or anything of use in the back of the van, making Will brace himself against the sides of the van once it started moving. It wasn't as bad as he would have expected, and he made the ride without being more than a bit bruised. The drive was long, and he couldn't make sense of the directions and turns they made. Not that it would have helped him much. He had no idea where they had been when they had started.

The Verger estate was enormous. Will knew it would be, but he had not been prepared for the exact grandeur that was Muskrat Farm. He couldn't hear the activity of a city nearby, the air

smelled fresh and unpolluted aside from the few vehicles that traveled in and out, and there was nothing in sight that was not clearly part of the farm.

There were long spanses of trees leading up to the house, and barns and stables for some kinds of livestock.

Will was sure he would not be seeing much of the outside of the buildings, so he drank in what he could as he was escorted, memorizing the sight.

If he ever had the chance to talk to the police, it would be easy to point the finger. Mason and the Verger estate were well known to everyone in the immediate area. The problem would be that he also had the majority of the authorities in his pocket. If Will escaped, he could not go to the police, or he would be given right back to the man and be punished. He had to be smarter than that if he wanted to survive and find something better than this.

Will was pushed roughly into the house, which was as grand on the inside as it was on the outside. The décor reflected the identity of the family who owned it. There were dead and stuffed animals at every turn, and items that had obviously been purchased just to show off how much money they could waste on such trivial things. Will was sure some of them were family heirlooms, but he could tell there was very little significance placed on the actions of those who were dead. The choices of the living were what this family judged.

Will didn't have much time to study the structure around him as he was pushed and pulled through doors and stairwells, half sure they were taking a winding route to confuse his internal map. He was pushed into a room that had a hook in the ceiling, and there was a team of four men there apparently awaiting his arrival.

The men were wearing something akin to surgical masks, so he couldn't see their faces below their eyes. One of them stepped forward and held out a pair of handcuffs. The message was clear.

The hand on Will's shoulder tightened slightly when Will hesitated, so he put the cuffs onto his wrists in compliance. He was not going to cause any problems yet.

His escorts then stepped out of the tiled room and shut the door behind them, leaving him with the team of masked men and the hook in the ceiling. Will had a sinking feeling he knew what was about to happen, but he mentally prepared himself to endure it.

The first man, who had green eyes and seemed to be the leader, stepped forward and took Will by the wrist. The ceiling was low enough that it was not too uncomfortable for the cuffs to be secured to the hook.

Will shivered as his clothes were cut from him in a surgical manner. He had no attachment to the clothing, but he did hope he would be provided with something to wear. He wasn't sure exactly what to expect from Mason yet, and he was worried.

Will was washed thoroughly, the team working with clinical detachment until he was as clean and bare as the day he had been born. They even washed his hair, which had been nice. It had

been allowed to grow long and get dirty beyond belief while he had been with the family, and it was pleasant to feel fresh again.

After he was dried, the team put him into a bathrobe. The escorts were invited back in and the cuffs were removed. Will was taken to another room, where he was sat in a chair. The escorts waited in silence, and Will had the feeling this was not the time to be asking questions.

About half an hour later, Mason Verger himself walked in, sizing Will up like a piece of meat. Will hated it, but he didn't show his discomfort. He had the feeling that would only please the man more.

"Stand up," Mason ordered, though his tone was still unconcerned, as if nothing in the world could touch him.

Will stood, standing at his full height and squaring his shoulders. He knew he had to look ridiculous in the fluffy bathrobe, but he didn't intend to be underestimated.

Mason looked him over, humming in consideration. He stepped forward and grabbed Will's chin, turning his head back and forth to look at him better. Will felt like he was one of Mason's pigs, being prepared for sale at an auction. It made his skin crawl.

"I'll need you to get your hair cut, and a clean shave," Mason decided.

Will tensed, feeling instinctively that it would be a bad thing for him to no longer have his protective layer of scruff. This man was not of the same ilk the others had been, and he was dangerous in a different way.

"I'd prefer not to shave," Will risked, hoping beyond hope the man would have some mercy on him.

Mason raised an eyebrow, but his eyes were bright with amusement and anticipation. Will knew he had lost that battle before Mason opened his slimy mouth again.

"Not your decision right now, Willy," Mason said cheerily, "if I don't like your face after the shave, I'll let you grow it back. Just let my man take care of you for now."

Will felt dread fill his stomach, but he didn't offer any resistance as he was led to yet another room. Mason didn't accompany them, which at least was something Will could be grateful for.

There was a man in this room who stared at Will with an empty look that spoke of several types of abuse, to the point where he was resigned to his fate.

"Mr. Verger wants his hair cut, and his face shaved clean," said one of the escorts, the first time Will had heard either of the men speak.

The man nodded numbly, placing his hands on Will's shoulders to put him in the chair.

"Hair short or long?" the man asked, and Will knew he wasn't asking him.

The escort shrugged.

“I think Mr. Verger wants the usual type of look, so whichever one that gets you there.”

Will dreaded whatever that meant, and the man’s face sank. He seemed to know what that meant, and it didn’t bode well for Will. Will hoped that whatever happened, he would be able to survive and escape, and have some form of revenge.

The man worked in silence, no sound but the clip of scissors as he cut Will’s hair to a respectable length. He left it about as long as Will actually preferred it, which Will took as a small mercy. Will closed his eyes when the straight razor came out, and he refused to witness the loss of his scruff. It wasn’t much, but he looked years younger without it.

And that was what Mason liked. Will’s skin crawled at the knowledge that he couldn’t identify the origin of. It was more a curse than anything to have this ability. It had gotten him nothing but trouble this far in his life.

When he was done, Will was escorted to another room, where there lay a set of actual clothes on a chair, and another man stood, apparently to help him into them.

Will felt a bit awkward having everything done for him, but he knew Mason was not going to leave him to his own devices. At least not yet. He had to earn his trust before that could happen.

It was just a plain suit, as far as Will could see. He felt completely odd and out of place in it, and he knew he must look like a child dressed up by his parents to attend a wedding of someone he didn’t even know. What he hated the most about his appearance just then, was that Mason would absolutely relish the sight.

Mason was sitting at the long dining room table when Will was escorted in. Will saw his eyes scan up his body until finally landing on his newly shaved face. Will suppressed a shudder at the look that crossed Mason’s face. He had been right about him, and his stomach turned at what might happen next.

“Come,” Mason said pleasantly, “sit down. Cordell is my personal chef. He is terribly good.”

Will walked forward and took a seat to Mason’s right, where a place had been set. The escorts stood behind him, as if he might make a break for it at any moment. He supposed that was only fair. He was technically a prisoner.

“You look much better without that terrible beard,” Mason said as Cordell came in and placed a plate of food in front of them each, “you look younger. Your big, blue eyes really give you the look of a lost child, don’t you think?”

Will didn’t want to answer, but he knew there would be repercussions if he didn’t. It would be seen as rude.

“I have been told that before,” Will admitted, “which is why I prefer to have some layer of scruff. No one takes me seriously if I look like a child.”

Mason grinned, taking a bite of whatever was set out in front of them. Will very much hated the man, and he was already anxious for the day he could punish him for his crimes.

“I can imagine. No one took me seriously as a kid either. I just decided to use that to my advantage. You ever think of that, Willy?”

Will would have liked to tear that man’s tongue out of his face, but he didn’t let it show. He kept a neutral expression as he answered.

“There’s not much in college a young face can get you. I also prefer honest work to shortcuts.”

Will knew every word was a gamble with the man. Mason Verger was volatile, and unpredictable. Will didn’t know what he would do at any point, and it was beginning to grate on his nerves. He would possibly go insane if an order was not established soon, so he could know what to expect.

Mason seemed to consider his words, but he was staring at Will’s bare face with a terrifying amount of interest. Will almost wanted to cower, but he didn’t want to lose any ground at this point. He couldn’t afford it.

“I suppose that’s true,” Mason said, “though I don’t have any experience in that realm. I was homeschooled by my dear papa. He taught me everything I know.”

Will bit his tongue against the potential insults he could snap back with. He didn’t actually want to know any more about whatever Mason had learned as a child. They were already treading in dangerous water as it was, and he didn’t want any more reason to lose control and tear Mason’s face off with his teeth. He had to be patient.

“Eat some, Willy,” Mason ordered, waving at the plate Will had left untouched to that point, “You’re too skinny. No fat on you.”

Will nodded, not wanting to think about his words too much. He lifted a bite to his mouth and chewed some of whatever it was. It was better than anything he had eaten in years, and he knew it had to be made with only the most expensive ingredients. The Vergers were the types to care more about value than actual quality.

“Now,” Mason said, once he was satisfied Will would eat his food, “I’d like to get to know you better before we get down to business. Tell me about your childhood.”

Will allowed himself to grimace, then, feeling it would not be held against him. He didn’t need to tell Mason the truth, but it wouldn’t hurt. It wouldn’t help either. It would do nothing to humanize him to the man. It would only give him more images of Will as a child to put in his filthy mind.

“I was an only child,” he said, “raised by a single father. I never knew my mother.”

Mason nodded, frowning in mock sympathy.

“I never knew my mother either,” he said, his tone clearly a mockery of actual sadness.

“That’s a lie,” Will stated, setting his fork down, “You want me to be a lie detector. Tell me if you don’t want me to tell you when you are lying.”

Mason smiled, apparently impressed. Will felt like that had been the least impressive show of his skill. Mason wasn’t even a good liar.

“Alright, Willy. Good show. No more of that about me, though. Only tell me if other people lie. I obviously know when I’m lying. Is that a deal?”

Will nodded, wishing Mason would stop using that sickening nickname. It made him want to refuse to eat, despite how hungry he was and the knowledge that he would be punished for not complying. There were a lot of things he absolutely mustn’t do in Mason’s company, but the man made it difficult to retain control.

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Will hadn’t always cared when people lied around him, and his ability went far beyond just detecting lies. It had been one misstep that had led to him being knocked over the head and dragged into the underworld of crime. He had seen the man notice him, but he had been tired and in desperate need of coffee.

When the girl behind him in line said she had lost her card and was running late for a final exam, he hadn’t given it a second thought. He handed her a couple dollars and told her she didn’t have to lie. He would have been happy to help either way.

The girl had tried to apologize, but Will had taken his own coffee and headed out. He had seen the man follow, but didn’t think anything would come of it. People were always curious about him, and he had learned to just ignore it. When a van had pulled up next to him and he was forcibly dragged into it, he realized he had made a mistake.

That was how he ended up with the family. Apparently they had been watching him for days before they snatched him. They liked that he could identify lies.

But Will could also sense intentions, recreate thought processes, predict actions, and theoretically leave a crime scene void of physical evidence completely. Not that the family had ever asked. They had just wanted a lie detector.

Mason, at least, seemed like an opportunity to utilize his other skills. He had an ambition about him that told Will he would want to get every use out of him that he could. Will could make himself too important to kill, and maybe get some benefits after some time.

He would have to play his cards right, though. He didn’t want a repeat of the family’s downfall. That had been a gamble, and he preferred to be able to trust the outcome.

Will didn’t know how long he would have to stay with the Vergers, but he just hoped it wouldn’t be long. He had once had plans and dreams for his future. Now he just wanted to

survive.

Mason hadn't touched Will, despite all the looks he had given him and vague threats of doing so. He had just put Will in a room and left him, as Mason presumably debated on what to do with him.

Will was glad of that, at least. The room wasn't even bad in comparison to his last home. There was a bed, and a window, and an actual bathroom connected to it. It was basically a five star hotel to Will.

It was while he lay in there, on the soft bed, that Will made a pleasant discovery. The Vergers had dogs.

Not small or fluffy dogs. He heard them walk down the hall, and knew they were the big ones that could be trained to be tough. Rottweilers, pitbulls, and great danes, if Will was right. He loved dogs, and hoped he would be able to see them at some point. He didn't care about breeds or types of dogs that much, because every dog was just a bundle of love if they were treated right. Will had never met a dog he didn't like, and the same could not be said for humans.

One human Will definitely did not like, was Carlo. He was the head of Mason's goons, as far as Will could tell, and he had a general disdain for anyone Mason seemed to like in any way. Apparently, that included Will. Will was the shiny new toy, and Carlo was suspicious of him. It was like he made up for Mason's overly giddy attitude by never smiling at all.

Will could respect that, but he didn't have to like Carlo for it. Especially since Carlo was going to make his life a lot harder during his stay. So far, he stood just outside the door Will was trapped behind, and growled angrily whenever Will so much as touched the doorknob.

As far as discouraging Will from escaping, it was pretty effective. He knew he was no match for the man if they were to fight, and he probably had at least one gun on his person at all times. No, if Will was going to escape, he would not go through Carlo. He would have to find a weak spot in the organization, and work through that. Carlo was not the weak point.

After hours of being alone in the room, Will had dozed off to sleep on the mattress. It was too soft and comfortable, and he hadn't slept well in years. As much as he tried to stay alert in the new place, he felt his eyes close and his mind drift off away from reality.

2

Chapter Summary

Warning!!! There is physical harm described in this chapter. It's in the tags, so be prepared. I just thought I should add another warning here.

Chapter Notes

Changing POVs

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Get up.”

Will snapped awake and looked up to see Carlo looming over him. He sat up quickly and stood to meet the man, keeping his eyes down so he didn’t look like he was trying to challenge him.

Carlo placed a hand on the back of Will’s neck and began to steer him through the house once more. The man didn’t offer any explanation, and Will didn’t dare ask for one.

After only a few minutes of walking, Will didn’t recognize where they were anymore. He knew he hadn’t seen even half of the property yet, but he was being shown more than he had expected to. Soon enough, he was sure they were coming to one of the stables, and Will felt his heart sink. He didn’t want to be treated like an animal again. He had hoped Mason would treat him better, if only because he hadn’t caused any problems yet.

It was the strangest set up Will had ever seen in a barn, and he had seen a fair few. There were stalls around the edge, but there was no loft. Instead, there was a large platform that looked to be for observing what went on in the stalls and the large pen area in the middle. It gave Will the strange impression that some sort of spectator’s sport went on here.

Carlo shoved Will into one of the stalls, and Will shuddered at what he saw.

There were ropes in the positions for restraining either an animal or a person. Will could see blood stains on the concrete floor, and he decided that at least he would die not looking like a homeless drunk.

A few more men came into the stall and stripped Will’s shirt off of him before shoving him down to his knees and tying his hands to the set of ropes behind him. Will managed to glance

up and see that Mason was grinning down from the platform and waving, before a thick leather collar was fixed around his throat and two more ropes attached to it. The rig forced Will to bend nearly completely in half and stare at the ground just in front of his knees. He was thankful to still be wearing pants, at least. He kept some amount of dignity.

Will heard the men moving around to all sides, and talking in another language. He could hear what sounded like enormous pigs in the other stalls, and they chuffed and snorted lazily.

Will heard the sizzle of hot metal a breath before the brand made contact with his back.

Will couldn't help but scream, and writhe under the intense pain that flowed through his entire body as the Verger seal was seared into his flesh. He could smell his own skin burning, and he had to make the conscious decision not to bite his own tongue off because of the pain.

He knew he had a high pain tolerance, but even this was beyond him. He knew burns, and the reality of what was happening, and would continue to happen after the metal was removed. He knew the agony he would be in for days or weeks after this event, and he mentally cursed Mason Verger with every religion he knew about, hoping that some god was listening and would make some of it come true.

Will didn't know when the brand had been taken away from him, but he was aware of a bucket of cold water splashing over his back, providing a bit of relief from the burning of the mark at the same time as causing his tensed muscles to ache from the cold.

Will's hands were untied, but the collar was left, making him fall slightly forward as if he was praying. The ropes were untied from the walls of the stall, and Will was pulled by them as if they were a leash. He was soaking wet, and in incredible pain that nearly caused his vision to blur. All he could do was stumble after the men that held his tether, and wonder why they hadn't just killed him.

Finally, Will was taken into a room that was much more sterile and bright than the stable had been. The man Will recognized as Cordell was waiting, smiling in a way that would have made Will's skin crawl if he were not already overwhelmed by conflicting sensations.

Carlo tied the ropes to two rings that were fastened to the ceiling a few feet apart from each other. It left Will unable to walk or move from one spot, but it was not wholly uncomfortable or restricting of his airway. He felt like a misbehaving dog being put on a chain for jumping the fence.

Carlo didn't say anything to Cordell before he left, but the man seemed to know what was expected of him. He organized a few things before he came to stand in front of Will with his same disgusting smile.

"I know you are not planning on attacking me, at least not yet," Cordell said, holding up a pair of handcuffs, "but what I am about to do might change your mind, so I must insist. And Carlo is going to be right outside, in case that helps you make up your mind."

Will offered his wrists up, knowing fighting it would be no use. Cordell nodded, still smiling, and slapped the cuffs on firmly. He gave them a tug to be sure they wouldn't slip off or break,

and then he moved away, out of Will's sight.

Will steadied his breathing, mentally preparing for whatever the sadist behind him was going to do. Will knew now that Cordell was definitely sadistic, making him a good match for Mason. They were truly made for each other, and would burn the world down just to hear the screams.

"Mister Verver wants to be sure you won't heal up too much from this," Cordell explained, "and that you don't forget about it too quickly either. I know just the way to make sure he gets what he wants, while making sure you don't die. Aren't you lucky?"

Will didn't answer, waiting for something to happen. That seemed to make the man more curious, because he peeked around Will's torso and looked at him.

"You can talk to me," he said, as if he wanted Will to talk, "you won't accomplish anything by doing it, but I won't have you punished for anything you say. You can just speak your mind freely."

Will didn't even meet the man's eyes. He wasn't going to give the man the satisfaction of speaking. Cordell shrugged and returned back behind Will, doing something in preparation.

Will hissed a breath through his teeth when he felt something being rubbed into his burnt flesh. It stung, and burned, and hurt. Will didn't know if it was a sort of medication or sterilizing agent, or if it was simply meant to be painful. Either way, he wouldn't allow himself to give voice to his discomfort. He had already pleased Mason by screaming. He refused to do the same for Cordell.

Cordell hummed in thought as he continued to apply the substance. Will knew he was disappointed. He had wanted Will to be loud. There had been others, and they had been loud when they were in pain. He liked that. Will grimaced at the images the thoughts conjured in his mind. He didn't want to be around these people, much less help them continue to be awful.

"The fact that Mister Verger used the brand on you means you're going to be staying for a while at least," Cordell revealed, "and you won't be leaving unless it's in a body bag."

Mason wanted Will to remember, every second of every day, who he belonged to. He was property of the Verger estate now. As far as anyone was concerned, Will was now nothing but an object.

Will rolled his neck as much as he could, feeling the limits of the leather and the amount of freedom it provided. It was strong, and left little room to move in it. It was definitely not made for any kind of dog Will had ever met. He imagined Mason had it specially made for his purposes. Will wondered exactly how many people Mason had under his thumb, and if there was anyone in the world he wouldn't be able to convince to turn a blind eye to his activities.

From what Will had learned about the world over the years, he was starting to think truly good people didn't exist. There were just evil people, pretending to be better than others.

“That won’t be coming off anytime soon,” Cordell chided him, referring to the collar, “mister Verger likes to know his things are secure.”

Will hated the way words slithered from Cordell's mouth. Like nightcrawlers, leaving trails of slime as they went. Will imagined they would leave their slime all through his organs, and make his mouth have a perpetually bad taste in it. A small retribution for what they really were.

Will just kept still as his burn was treated, repressing shivers from the cold water he was still covered in. He wondered if they were going to give him new clothes, or if the initial hospitality had just been for show. He didn’t know if he would last very long being treated the way he had been with the family. He was already dangerously malnourished, and his mental state could stand some improvement. Adding hypothermia to the mix would really put him in danger, and he didn’t know if he was considered valuable enough to treat at that point.

When Cordell was done with his own version of torturing, Carlo returned, placing his hand on the back of Will’s neck to steer him back to the room he had fallen asleep in earlier. Will was grateful for at least that. If he was going to die, at least he would be comfortable. To his surprise, there was a fresh pair of pants sitting on the bed. He quickly stripped out of the wet ones and felt instantly warmer when he pulled the dry pair on.

Will curled up on the bed once more and allowed himself to fall back into unconsciousness. He was exhausted from the events of the day. Even the pain he was still in from the branding could not anchor him to reality as his eyes closed and darkness overcame him.

Mason had a new toy, it seemed.

The man was sitting to the corner, the ropes tied to his collar and a ring in the wall. He was not wearing a shirt, and Hannibal knew he was probably sporting a fairly fresh branding on his back. A practice Hannibal did not approve of, but didn’t bring up to Verger himself. He was also fitted with a mask that seemed to be to prevent biting, and Hannibal understood the reason when his patient was revealed.

Mason’s personal everything, Cordell, had a round chunk of flesh taken from his face. Hannibal recognized it as a bite, and he gained a new level of respect for whoever the pet was.

As a general rule, Hannibal didn’t ask questions about what Mason did, but he was insatiably curious about this new person. As he worked on Cordell’s face, Hannibal found his thoughts repeatedly drawn to the man and his bright eyes. There was an intelligence there that wasn’t found in most people, especially those who kept company with Mason Verger.

When Cordell was done, and his face properly taken care of, Hannibal decided to take some time to find out what he could about the curious new person.

Mason grinned, and poured them each a glass of wine. The man was in the corner, watching Hannibal like he could see right through him and study his very soul. It was exhilarating just

to feel his gaze, and Hannibal was terribly intrigued.

“I can guess with some certainty what occurred,” Hannibal said, tipping his head toward the man.

Mason shrugged, still smiling like it was his birthday.

“Willy has a bad temper sometimes. Cordell can also be a bit mean. It was bound to happen, but I do have to punish Willy for it.”

Hannibal hummed. He doubted the man’s name was actually “Willy” but Mason didn’t have the imagination to come up with anything original. He was probably a William or Will. At least he had been able to learn that much, if nothing more.

“I do wonder why you would keep someone around who is so volatile, especially after an inconvenience such as this,” Hannibal wondered aloud.

Mason clapped like he was excited to show off his new toy, and Hannibal knew Will really was nothing more to the man. Mason waved for Hannibal to come with him, closer to where the man was tied.

Hannibal could see scars from past abuse, but not the kind Mason preferred. Mason must have found him somewhere. He could also see abrasions where the collar rubbed against the pale skin of the man’s neck, shoulders, and jaw. He had recently had his face shaved, and his hair had probably been cut at the same time. Hannibal hoped the man’s boyish looks hadn’t made Mason do anything terribly uncouth with him, though he didn’t dare expect that to be the case.

“Willy,” Mason cooed, as if he were speaking to a particularly clever parrot, “does Doctor Lecter have any intentions to betray my trust?”

Hannibal’s interest was instantly increased exponentially, once by the question, and again by the way the man met his eyes with his own brilliantly blue gaze that seemed to pierce his soul.

“No,” Will stated, “he doesn’t agree with everything you do, but he’s too curious to see how everything turns out. He has no intention to interfere and put himself at risk. He’s pretentious, and wouldn’t sink to the level of meddling in your affairs.”

Hannibal smiled softly in wonder. He wanted to know everything, but he knew he would have to be careful in asking questions.

“How does he do it?” he asked, careful to address Mason so as not to insult him.

Mason waved at Will casually.

“He’s the one who knows how it works. Go ahead and talk to him for a bit. He’s my most useful pet at the moment.”

Hannibal internally grimaced at the terms Mason used to refer to another human being, especially one who was probably more intelligent than he had any hope to be. He didn't let his disapproval show when he nodded, but Will's lips pulled into a soft, knowing smile when he turned back.

"Very well, then. What gives you the ability to understand me so well?" Hannibal asked, letting his genuine curiosity shine through for Will's benefit.

Will visibly straightened, holding dignity in his body despite his circumstances. It was admirable, seeing the state he was in. He still had pride in himself.

"I'd like to say my degrees in psychology and forensics are entirely responsible for it, but the truth is that I have an empathy disorder that gives me the ability to see the thoughts of others, predict their actions to an extent, and reconstruct their thought processes with near perfection. My education is only secondary to my inherent skill," Will answered, his tone as confident and sure as anything. Hannibal decided he was most certainly a Will.

"I wish my horse had the speed of your tongue," he replied, a slight test and half a message.

Recognition flashed in Will's eyes, and he smiled behind the mask.

"I was born to speak all mirth and no matter," he answered quickly, matching Hannibal with ease.

Hannibal was pleased. If nothing else, this man was incredibly intelligent.

"Experience is by industry achieved and perfected by the swift course of time," Hannibal said, checking the boundaries of the man's wit.

Will furrowed his brow in concentration. It seemed he had not studied Shakespeare intimately during his course of education. Hannibal had not truly expected him to meet him where he stood, but Will was making a good show of trying.

"Two Gentlemen of Verona," Will mumbled, thinking, then, "to be a well-favored man is the gift of fortune; but to write and read comes by nature."

Hannibal accepted the shift back to the original play they had quoted, recognizing Will did not have the extensive knowledge required to quote as many as Hannibal would.

Hannibal hummed pleasantly, studying the man who was far too intelligent to be in his position. The man should have been working for the FBI or, if he were otherwise predisposed, running an organization such as the Verger estate himself. He was clever and skilled in things that would serve anyone well in life, but he found himself a prisoner to a man who cared little for knowledge or wisdom, and only found joy in the suffering of others.

"You are full of pretty answers," he mused.

Will didn't answer, recognizing that Hannibal did not expect him to. The two men just watched each other for a moment, caught in equal wonder of the other.

Hannibal straightened up, knowing Mason would be growing impatient. He turned back to his host, though he would have preferred to continue speaking with Will until he withered and died.

“Incredible,” Hannibal said, “How on earth did you find him?”

Mason grinned, waving for Hannibal to come with him to a table where their wine was sitting. They took up their glasses again, but did not leave the room. It appeared Mason preferred to stay within Will’s sight. Whether it was so Will might warn him of traitors, or so Mason could watch him in case of another outburst, Hannibal was unsure. It did provide Hannibal with the opportunity to study the man a bit more as they spoke, for which he was pleased.

“It’s actually a terribly funny story,” Mason told him cheerily, “I recently decided to take over the family. A few of my men went to do business, and Willy there told Bruist that they had no intentions to betray him. We easily took them over, because they trusted the boy so much. Turns out, he lied because he didn’t like them much, and he wanted us to take them out like we did. He’s a terribly clever little one.”

Hannibal hummed in agreement, watching Will react to the tale. He didn’t seem to regret it, or feel any remorse for the many lives that must have been lost because he had bid them be. He just stood tall, with confidence in his words and decisions.

“And you trust he will not do the same to you?” Hannibal asked, genuinely curious about why the risk would be worth it to Mason.

Mason waved the question away, unconcerned.

“If you saw how they were treating him, you would understand. He was as thin as a rail when I got him, and his room now is a palace in comparison to what the family had given him. He won’t betray me unless he thinks he can get something better from whoever he thinks could take me over. Not that there’s anyone who has the manpower to take what I have.”

Hannibal nodded.

Will was still extremely thin, to the point where Hannibal was concerned about his health. His condition would also leave him susceptible to mental illness from abuse or exposure to people like Mason. He was already incredibly pale, and Hannibal would have liked to tell mason he needed warmer clothes and sun exposure. He knew that would not be received well, though. Mason didn’t like to be criticized.

“What was all that stuff you were saying to each other? It sounded fancy.”

Hannibal nodded, taking a sip of the expensive wine. All things were expensive with Mason, even if they were not actually high quality.

“Shakespeare,” he answered honestly, “He says he is an educated man, and I was curious to test that. He understood and met my every word. He is incredibly intelligent.”

Mason scrunched his face in childish confusion. He was still very immature in most ways, having never been held accountable for learning to function as an adult. Hannibal was not fond of him in any sense of the word, and only ever spoke to the man when he was needed to do a job. Mason was not stingy when he paid Hannibal, not that Hannibal needed his money. He did not intend to be on Mason's bad side.

"I always knew you were odd," Mason eventually said with a shrug, "but I understand being curious about Willy. He's a real treat, isn't he?"

Hannibal nodded.

"Truly a rarity," he agreed, "you are lucky to have found him. I can imagine how much of an asset he must be for you."

Mason shrugged again.

"I have good taste," he bragged.

Hannibal would have liked to differ, but he knew better than to insult the man. He kept his thoughts to himself, and perhaps Will, until he excused himself to return to his practice. He did not want to make a habit of keeping company in the Verger house, but he would very much like to have the chance to see Will again.

Chapter End Notes

Quotes are from:
"I wish my horse had the speed of your tongue" -Much Ado About Nothing
"I was born to speak all mirth and no matter" -Much Ado About Nothing
"To be a well favored man is the gift of fortune; but to write and read comes by nature" -Much Ado About Nothing
"You are full of pretty answers" -As You Like It
(wow, do I have a favorite play or something? XD)

3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Doctor Lecter. The plastic surgeon that Mason trusted to reconstruct Cordell's damaged face.

Will would be seeing him again.

Will wasn't sure how he knew it, but when he had met the man's eyes, something had settled in his chest. He had known with clarity and complete surety that he would see the Doctor again.

The man was more intelligent than most Will had met since being taken by Mason. Mason didn't tend to surround himself with men of great intelligence, being more comfortable with those on the same level as himself. Lecter was smart, but had an internal darkness that allowed him to move between the light and the dark without being noticed by either. Will could see it in his eyes. There was a monster there, but it was greater and more exquisite than what pitiful creatures resided in the Verger house.

Mason was not even a monster, in Will's mind. He was a corrupted child who had never been told no. He had been groomed by his father to be cruel and disgusting, and he refused to know any better. That was not to say he wasn't to blame for his actions. He was entirely capable of choosing to act differently. He simply enjoyed being what he was.

But Lecter. Lecter appreciated beauty in every form. He could appreciate the beauty of both creation and destruction. In both kindness and cruelty. In joy and in pain. He dwelt in a world of his own creation, where all beautiful things could reside in harmony, away from the eyes of those who would not understand that they were all beautiful.

Will wished he could step into that world. He ached to exist within that realm, where none of his thoughts would cause him shame, and none of his words met with anger. He could imagine what it would be like, to be free of not only the bonds that now held him, but also of the expectations that had plagued him when he had been in society before. To be accepted for what he was, instead of praised for what he could pretend to be.

Will would wait for the man to return. He would watch for him, but if he did not present himself, Will knew how to invite him again. He would not be wearing the muzzle for eternity, after all.

Carlo had been gone for a few days, and Will was taking careful advantage of his absence. The other guards didn't mind hearing him talking, and he had a bit to say to them when they were around.

It was slow going, but Will could feel the changes in their manners and attitudes. They were steadily growing suspicious of each other, and Will hoped they would choose to maim each other sooner than later.

He wanted to see Doctor Lecter again. He was bored.

Hannibal was curious when Mason called him again. He had been assured that Will had nothing to do with this one. It had been a disagreement between two of the guards, and they had broken into physical fighting when they were changing shifts.

Hannibal believed that Mason believed that Will had nothing to do with it.

Hannibal also believed Will was more clever than anyone in the house, and had carefully manipulated his surroundings in order to entertain himself. Hannibal could imagine Will's life had been rather boring since being found by Mason. Doing nothing but sussing out liars all day could not stimulate a mind so great as his for long.

Hannibal was happy to make the journey back to Muskrat farm, even knowing he would have to speak with Mason. He wanted to know more about Will. Perhaps if he could discover his last name, he would be able to look up the man and find more without Mason knowing.

Felle had been attacked by Josto, and had gotten a good cut to his face. Neither man was terribly injured, but Mason had asked Hannibal to put Felle's face back together as well as he could.

It was almost funny to think that Mason would bother getting a plastic surgeon for his thugs, but Hannibal supposed he just threw money at his problems and waited for them to go away. He was the kind of person to not care, as long as he could continue with whatever he wanted to do. Money was not an obstacle that he cared about.

Cordell met him at the door, ushering Hannibal through to where the patient was. Hannibal could see that his face was healing well, which pleased him to see his work. Hannibal didn't often do house calls, but for his powerful clients he could make the sacrifice.

Hannibal worked quickly, though of course with his usual care. He had never botched an operation, and his patients were always pleased with the results. He had been gifted with sharp eyes and steady hands.

The cut had not been too bad, especially for an injury during a fight. It was a simple job to stitch it back together and leave minimal scarring.

Hannibal asked to see Mason again, and Cordell led him to a sitting room. Cordell told him to sit while he went to get Mason. Hannibal took a seat and hoped Mason would bring Will with him, or else he would be trapped in conversation with Mason without the benefit of learning more about the man he was actually curious about.

After a time, Mason appeared, accompanied by Josto who was leading Will in by the ropes tied to his collar.

Will's eyes lit up a bit when he saw Hannibal, though he did a good job of hiding it. He quickly lowered his gaze to the floor again and walked to the corner where Josto tied him to the wall again. He was wearing a full suit now, though Hannibal would have chosen different fabrics for him. Will sat down on the floor and crossed his legs.

"Well, Hannibal. I'm so pleased to see you again," Mason said, grinning, "It's not every day you come by and ask for a chat."

Hannibal nodded, glad Mason didn't offer his hand for a handshake. He had terribly clammy hands, and Hannibal did not enjoy touching him in any capacity.

"Thank you for having me, Mason. It seems you have been having an increasingly frequent need of me. I can't help being curious," Hannibal replied, not entirely lying.

He knew exactly why the incidents had increased. He wanted to know if Mason had figured it out, while learning whatever he could about Will. Even just being in the same room as him was satisfying some need that Hannibal hadn't realized he felt until it was lifted. There was an enchantment about Will that was pulling him in, and he was fascinated by it.

Mason winked, tipping his head toward Will conspiratorially.

"Mister Graham enjoys playing with people almost as much as I do. The thing is, I can never catch him doing it. I don't know how he's doing it, but it's absolutely delightful, don't you think?" Mason asked, sounding as delighted by it all as he would have Hannibal believe he was.

Hannibal hummed, taking the invitation to look at Will. He studied the man, who was seemingly pretending not to hear what they were discussing. He was sitting with perfect posture, and clear eyes. His hair fell over his ears in dark curls, and his jaw was unobstructed by the mask this time. Hannibal could see that a layer of stubble had been allowed to start. Mason must not have been very interested in him that way anymore.

The idea that Will was somehow manipulating those around him, without leaving any trace of his work other than the shift of others' personalities, was breathtaking. Hannibal could see the potential, and the intense fire burning in Will's eyes, and he wanted to set it free and watch the world be consumed.

"Absolutely," Hannibal agreed, "I was trained to become a psychiatrist before I became a surgeon, so I find matters of the mind particularly fascinating. I would be grateful to you if I could speak with him a bit more. I may be able to shed some light on how he has been affecting the behavior of your employees."

Mason narrowed his eyes at Hannibal, and Hannibal wasn't sure if he was actually suspicious or just faking it. Mason's face was perpetually just short of humorous, and Hannibal would have admired the vague nature of it if he were not currently wanting something from the man.

“He’s a clever fish, Doctor Lecter,” Mason said, “How can I trust he won’t make you try something?”

Hannibal smiled and spread his hands.

“If I were to try anything, I have every faith that you would be able to stop me before I caused you more than a slight inconvenience,” he offered magnanimously, “that being said, I am not a suggestible individual, and I believe I can withstand any games he may wish to play with me.”

Mason grinned again, apparently having been faking his concern.

“Alright. I’ll take a bit out of your pay for the operation, but you get to talk to Willy over there,” he decided, “is that fair to you?”

Hannibal nodded politely. He would have offered to speak with Will as payment completely if he had needed to, though he was glad it had not come to that. He did not want Mason to know he had any leverage. That was a dangerous place to be.

“I find that completely fair to us both,” Hannibal said.

Mason clapped once and stood up.

“Well, have fun, Doctor. And let me know if you figure anything out that could help me reign him in a little, right?” he asked with a wink.

Hannibal kept his smile plastered to his face and agreed, though he was bored of Mason already. He wanted to talk to Will.

Mason left, telling Josto to stay just outside the door while they spoke. Hannibal was pleased they would have some form of privacy for the conversation, even if it was mostly imagined.

Once the door was closed, Hannibal stood up and walked over to where Will sat. Will looked up at him expectantly, knowing Hannibal would begin the conversation. Hannibal lowered himself to sit on the floor facing Will. It was uncharacteristic of him to set himself on the floor, but he believed Will was his equal, and refused to set himself above him by choice.

“A robin redbreast in a cage puts all heaven in a rage,” Hannibal said to begin.

There was a familiar spark in Will’s eyes as he looked to recognize the quote. He nodded and considered it for a moment, choosing his reply.

“In every voice, in every ban, the mind forged manacles I hear,” Will said, seeming pleased with himself for producing it.

Hannibal had to admit to himself that it was incredible to find anyone who matched him in wit and intelligence. Will seemed to have the aptitude, if not all the necessary material, to do so. Hannibal wished to provide him with more, so they could learn each other better.

“I would like to ask how you are feeling, without pretense and without ulterior motive, Will,” Hannibal said, lowering his voice so Josto would not overhear him.

Will’s eyes swam with conflicting emotions, and he flicked his gaze to the door as if he expected it to burst open and the room to be swarmed with thugs the moment he replied.

“How would you expect me to be feeling, Doctor Lecter?” he replied, his voice shaking almost imperceptibly. He tipped his chin up in defiance, but Hannibal could see he was frightened and his nerves were worn.

Hannibal frowned softly and looked Will over with a gentle gaze.

“I expect you are feeling a bit hopeless, being in the situation you are. You likely also are feeling chills and fevers, if my observations are correct. You are still not being fed properly, so I would imagine you feel hunger more often than not. Your muscles and mind will begin to atrophy if you are not given better conditions soon. I would consider that a great loss.”

Will's eyes were wide, and his chin quivered almost like a frightened child. He blinked quickly to keep the tears at bay, but Hannibal felt a strange pang of sympathy for him. Hannibal had to fight back memories of his own past, or else nothing could be accomplished.

“What can I do?” Will whispered, turning his eyes down to the floor between them.

Hannibal was not in the habit of becoming involved in the lives of others, but he knew then that he would not be able to leave Will there, in Mason’s care. He would have to do something to remedy the situation.

“Vengeance is in my heart, death in my hand, blood and revenge are hammering in my head,” Hannibal said softly, willing the other to understand what he was trying to say.

Will looked back up and met Hannibal’s gaze. He seemed to be searching Hannibal’s eyes for some sign of truth, and Hannibal allowed himself to show his sincerity.

“For which of my bad parts dids’t thou first fall in love with me?” Will asked, hesitating as he spoke, as if he might be misunderstanding what he saw.

Hannibal smiled. He reached forward and gently took one of Will’s hands in his, recognizing the stirrings of affection within himself. He was unsure if he could call it love just yet, but he knew he was entirely enchanted and wished for nothing more than to have Will for himself, and ensure he was well cared for.

“You have bereft me of all words, only my blood speaks to you in my veins,” he answered, “I am sure my love’s more ponderous than my tongue.”

Will blushed lightly, and Hannibal decided it was a lovely thing to see. He would like to see it again and again, until Will was no longer bashful of him.

“I will follow thee, to the last gasp with truth and loyalty,” Will replied, “They do not love that do not show their love.”

Hannibal smiled softly and leaned forward slightly. He pressed a light kiss to Will's forehead, hearing Will's breath stutter as he did so.

"Believe then, if you please, that I can do strange things," Hannibal said, "I love you with so much of my heart that none is left to protest."

Will laughed softly, being careful not to be too loud. He gently squeezed Hannibal's fingers and furrowed his brow.

""Let me be that I am, and seek not to alter me," he said, his tone pleading.

Hannibal was glad he was the one to have discovered Will in this way. No one else could comprehend what Will was, much less desire for him to be it. Anyone else who would seek to free Will would want him to change and be what they wanted. Hannibal wanted nothing but what Will had to give.

"By my soul I swear, there is no power in the tongue of men to alter thee," Hannibal promised.

Will smiled.

"God hath given you a face, and you make yourself another," he mused, "false face must hide what the false heart doth know."

Hannibal smiled in return.

"Is he honest who resists his genius or conscience only for the sake of present ease or gratitude?" he replied.

Will shook his head in amusement. He seemed to be feeling better, if nothing else. Hannibal was unsure if Will believed he would do what he promised, but he was determined to succeed. Will would learn that Hannibal always kept his promises.

"Well, Doctor Lecter. I think you probably have something of psychology to ask of me. You told Mason you are educated on the subject," Will stated, dropping the game for the time, "So what would you like to know?"

Hannibal nodded and reclaimed his hand in case someone should walk in.

"You also have a degree in psychology," he recalled, "what is your theory of how you are able to understand others so well?"

Will grinned as if he had waited his entire life for someone to ask his opinion on the matter.

"I believe my empathy disorder is caused by an abundance of mirror neurons," he declared confidently.

Hannibal nodded in consideration. Most people would lose the majority of their mirror neurons as they grew, needing that space for other functions. It would make sense for

someone with such a unique ability to have a condition that kept them instead. What made it even more interesting was that Will's intelligence did not seem to suffer from it.

"That is astute. I would hazard to guess you have never had any studies done to confirm or deny your hypothesis. It would likely have been inconclusive if you had," Hannibal thought aloud.

Will huffed a soft laugh.

"I've had a bad experience with psychiatrists in the past," he said with a shrug, "they always wanted to get in my head and move the furniture around. You're lucky I'm desperate for intelligent company, or I'd have decided against talking to you the moment you said you were trained as one."

Hannibal was pleased to hear his spirit was not broken, even in the terrible place he was.

"I account myself incredibly blessed, then," Hannibal agreed, "Though I would not wish the conditions upon you. Have you found that the good things that reside in your mind are tainted by the horrors that your condition predisposes you to witness?"

Will hummed softly, closing his eyes. He seemed much more relaxed now than Hannibal had seen him yet. Hannibal vowed he would see Will relaxed, with no care in the world upon his shoulders.

"I know that they have been tainted, over time. I built forts, but they were not enough. Too quick in construction, far too quick in destruction. I still have a fain few things that I can recall to make myself smile, but I use them sparingly."

Hannibal watched Will as he seemed to wander through his own mind. A peculiar peace overcame him, and Hannibal wanted to bottle it and present it to him later as a gift. He would that he could provide Will with peace whenever he wished.

After a few moments, Will opened his eyes. They were a light blue, like the sky, but they quickly darkened into a stormy grey. Will focused on Hannibal again, and then his eyes widened and he ducked his head.

"Sorry," he mumbled.

Hannibal smiled.

"Lost in thought?" he asked.

Will looked back up and raised an eyebrow.

"Not all who wander are lost, Doctor Lecter."

Hannibal nodded. Every word Will said left Hannibal wanting more, and he was determined to have his fill some day. There would be a day where he knew Will's words as well as his own, and they would share their minds the way they shared their words.

Chapter End Notes

Quotes are from:
"A robin redbreast in a cage puts all heaven in a rage" -William Blake
"In every voice, in every ban, the mind forged manacles I hear" -William Blake
"Vengeance is in my heart, death in my hand, blood and revenge are hammering in my head" -Titus of Andronicus
"For which of my bad parts didst thou first fall in love with me?" -Much Ado About Nothing
"You have bereft me of all words, only my blood speaks to you in my veins" -The Merchant of Venice
"I'm sure my love's more ponderous than my tongue" -King Lear
"I will follow thee, to the last gasp with truth and loyalty" -As You Like It
"They do not love that do not show their love" -Two Gentlemen of Verona
"Believe then, if you please, that I can do strange things" -As You Like It
"I love you with so much of my heart that none is left to protest" -Much Ado About Nothing
"Let me be that I am and seek not to alter me" -Much Ado About Nothing
"By my soul I swear, there is no power in the tongue of man to alter [thee]" -The Merchant of Venice *I changed that last word to use it
"God hath given you a face, and you make yourself another" -Hamlet
"False face must hide what the false heart doth know" -Macbeth
"Is he honest who resists his genius or conscience only for the sake of present ease of gratification?" -William Blake

4

Chapter Summary

Plans are set in motion

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will had no idea why he had allowed that.

He had seen the desire and spark of *something* that could grow into love in Hannibal's eyes, and he had decided to nurture it and make it grow.

Maybe it had been some twisted survival instinct, making him choose a path that seemed open and to have little resistance. He may have just been desperate to find a way out of his imprisonment.

Was he just manipulating Doctor Lecter into helping him escape?

What kind of person was he to take advantage of the first person to actually show concern and kindness towards him in *years* ? Had the time he had spent being treated as an object left him with no moral code?

No.

Will had a moral code, no matter how twisted it may have been. He had a hierarchy of justice, and the first step was to escape and exact revenge on Mason Verger. The family had been dealt with by proxy, but now Mason would pay for the suffering he caused.

After that was dealt with, Will would have time to deal with whether or not he should feel guilty about using Lecter.

Things must be done in order, or nothing would ever be done.

Will would escape this place, and then deal with Doctor Lecter.

Will huddled on his bed, shivering. He had never been given blankets, but the weather had turned colder since his arrival, and the room was not heated well enough. He was pretty sure the window only had single panes of glass, meaning it didn't insulate as well as double panes would. Will didn't even know where a heating vent would be located in the room if it had one. He hadn't found one anywhere during his time in the room.

He wondered how long it would take Hannibal to get him out.

Will had started thinking of him as Hannibal, instead of Doctor Lecter. He hadn't even been conscious of the change in his own head until he found himself mouthing the name and feeling how it rolled around on his tongue.

Will would entertain himself in the hours between visitors by talking to Hannibal.

Hannibal had not come by again yet, as far as Will knew, but Will's imagination provided him with a good enough ghost of the man. He would talk, and know relatively well what Hannibal would say in response. Their conversations often turned philosophical, or Hannibal would say how he would like Will to read as much as his mind could hold, so then they might discuss it. Will had come to enjoy the company of this imago, but he knew it was all in his head.

Perhaps he really *did* need a psychiatrist.

Not that he would ever be able to see one. After escaping here, he didn't know what kind of grounds he would be on with society and the authorities in general. He might end up on the run for all he knew.

Still, it would be better than this.

Will pulled his blazer closer around himself and tucked his legs up close to his body to try to warm up. He had never been given any clothes other than these suits. He would be given a new one when the set he was wearing became noticeably dirty or wrinkled, but he had never received sleeping clothes or leisure clothes.

He knew why Mason did it.

There was more than one reason, actually. Mason wanted Will to be "presentable" at any given moment. Since Will had been there, he had been called out of his room at all hours. Mason also wanted Will to be constantly reminded that he was not free. He did not have leisure time. He did not have privileges. He did not have agency over his own life. He belonged to Mason.

Will thought the brand on his back, or the collar around his neck, was reminder enough for that, but he knew Mason was not exactly a logical being.

The burned edges of the brand rubbed and snagged on the fabric of his shirt, stinging and scratching his tender flesh. Will tried to ignore it, and pretend it wasn't there. He was his own person, and he was the master of his own actions. No one owned him, and he was an agent of the universe. He was a force Mason would regret messing with.

Will heard rapid speech just outside his door.

Carlo was speaking to another thug. Will had gleaned that the majority of them were Sardinian, and they spoke in mostly another language that he didn't know.

The other thug sounded confused, but Carlo just sounded angry as usual. He told the other something with a tone of finality, and there were retreating footsteps. Will waited, listening carefully.

It wasn't often anyone needed to speak with Carlo unless they were requesting Will's presence somewhere on Mason's behalf. Will hated being caught off guard by Carlo coming into the room to fetch him. The thug was frightening at the best of times, and Will tried to never turn his back on the man.

After a moment, Carlo opened the door. Will sat up to meet him, and he could see the change in Carlo's demeanor. He seemed suspicious of something, though Will knew there was no reason for him to think Will was up to anything. Will was waiting for someone on the outside. He wouldn't start anything on his own.

Carlo attached the ropes to Will's collar and pulled him along through the halls.

The building was huge, and Will still had not created a complete internal map of the place, but he knew they were headed toward Mason's favorite sitting room. The one he preferred to see people in. Especially when he was going to show Will off to them.

Will steeled himself in preparation for whatever Mason may have in mind for him that day. It was rarely ever pleasant. The only time Mason had ever done anything for Will that Will had enjoyed was when Hannibal came over. The one thing that Will would ever admit Mason had truly given him, was Hannibal Lecter.

Speak of the devil, and he shall appear.

There Hannibal was, sitting in a chair, facing the door Will was brought through. Mason was sitting in a chair facing Hannibal, with his back to Will and Carlo. Hannibal smiled pleasantly at Will, and Will couldn't help smiling a bit in return.

It must be time.

"Carlo," Mason said, not turning to the door, "Just put Willy in his corner. Then, I want you to go get some of the dogs. Doctor Lecter said he was interested in seeing them."

Carlo scowled at Will and Hannibal each in turn, but did as he was asked.

There was something different about Mason's tone as he spoke, but Carlo didn't seem to notice before he walked back out of the room. Will sat obediently in his corner and waited for some signal from Hannibal.

"You need to get me a prescription for this stuff, doc," Mason said, still slurring his words a bit, "It's fantastic!"

Hannibal smiled to Mason, who Will still couldn't see well.

Carlo brought three dogs in, and Will smiled at the sight of them. Mason waved Carlo away once the dogs had been delivered, and soon they were left without him. Will was sure he was just outside the door, though. They would have to be careful when they made a move.

“Here,” Hannibal said, leaning forward to hand something to Mason that glinted in the light, “if you would be so kind.”

Mason took the knife with excitement and began to carve a piece of flesh from his face. Will didn’t know what was going on, but he was fascinated. He watched as Mason pulled the flesh away and fed it to one of the dogs. Then, he went back for another. He chatted nonsensically about nothing in particular as he did it, but Hannibal just smiled and nodded as he did. The words were soon even more slurred and incomprehensible because of the mutilation happening to his face, but Will just watched. He wondered what Hannibal meant to accomplish by this.

“Keep working, Mason,” Hannibal said, standing up, “I must exchange some words with Will for a moment.”

Mason agreed readily and continued to carve his face as Hannibal straightened his suit and walked over to where Will was observing.

“Do you still wish to join me?” Hannibal asked, seeming genuinely curious.

Will looked up at him with a neutral expression. He felt nothing but disgust towards Mason, and wasn’t frightened by the display at all.

“If you will have me,” Will answered calmly, “though your next steps are unclear to me at the moment.”

Hannibal smiled and bent down to untie the ropes from the collar around Will’s neck. Will lifted his chin to allow him better access, and Hannibal made quick work of it. He helped Will to stand, and soon they were standing face to face. Will realized he wasn’t much shorter than Hannibal, though the other man had broader shoulders which gave him a commanding appearance.

“I’m hungry!” Mason called over his shoulder, giving Will a view of his entire shredded face. It was truly a mangled mess, and Will couldn’t find it in himself to feel sorry about it.

“Eat your nose,” Hannibal answered calmly, not taking his eyes off of Will.

Mason considered that for a moment before he lifted the knife to his face and sliced off his nose, popping it into his mouth like a grape.

“What’s the plan, Doctor?” Will asked, unbothered by the scene playing out. He had seen worse things in his life up until then, and at least this one had been earned.

Hannibal smiled.

“You will escape,” he began softly, “and I will cause as much confusion as I am capable of. My car is only down the road a bit once you leave through this window. I will misdirect the search, so you will have time to get there. They will have no reason to suspect me, and Mason will be much more of a concern to them than you are.”

Will nodded, remembering how the property looked outside the room they were in. He looked out the window and saw the road only a few yards away. It had been cleared of snow, and he saw it wind away into the trees.

“How long will I be waiting until you return?” Will asked.

Hannibal hummed in thought, likely calculating his answer.

“No more than an hour,” he replied, “I tend to work quickly.”

Will took a deep breath and nodded again. He was mentally preparing himself for the run through the snow until he found the car. He started his way over to the window, but Hannibal put a hand on his shoulder to stop him.

“You are not wearing shoes,” he noted.

Will blushed and ducked his head to stare at his bare toes.

“I haven’t had shoes since the family took me,” he explained, feeling ashamed of his appearance despite it not being his fault, “It discourages escape attempts.”

Hannibal pressed his lips together and turned back to Mason, who was still feeding pieces of his face to the dogs.

“Mason. Take off your shoes,” Hannibal instructed.

Will gawked as Mason did just that. He pulled off his shoes and set them to the side of his chair, as if obeying an instruction from his “dear papa”.

“And your socks, Mason,” Hannibal continued, “let us see those little pigs.”

It was completely absurd to hear those words, spoken so seriously by a man as refined as Hannibal Lecter. The entire situation was completely unreal, and Will almost wondered if he might wake up in his room again, shivering against the cold.

Mason did as he was asked, peeling off the socks and wiggling his toes with a giggle.

“They're gonna go “eeeeeeeeee!” all the way home!” Mason exclaimed giddily.

Hannibal’s eyes glittered with humor as he carried the shoes and socks back to Will.

“Indeed they will, Mason,” he replied, handing the shoes off to Will with a wink, “Now, I think you need to find Felle. He’s missing. The others are going to try to stop you. You mustn’t let them.”

Mason’s eyes widened and he nodded seriously, standing up from his seat and walking toward the door. Will pulled the shoes on over the socks, working quickly and making his way to the window. He rolled out into the snow and pulled the window closed behind him just in time to catch sight of Mason pulling the door open. He ducked down out of sight and followed the wall for a few meters before darting off down the road.

Will heard the resounding panic start as he ran off, and he just prayed Hannibal would be able to get out of there as well.

Hannibal finally made his way back to his Bentley, praying Will had made it safely there. He didn't know what he would do if Will had been recaptured, and he refused to consider Will being killed.

Hannibal peered in the windows before getting in, but didn't see Will there. He felt his heart sink at the thought that Will hadn't made it.

Once Hannibal slid into the driver's seat, he realized why he hadn't been able to see Will.

Will was curled up in the thick black blanket Hannibal had left on the back seat, and he was laying on the floor behind the front seats. He was completely hidden from an outside viewer, and Hannibal wondered if he had fallen asleep.

His answer came only a moment later.

"I think I should stay back here for a bit," Will said, his voice muffled by the blanket.

Hannibal hummed in agreement as he started the engine.

"That is probably advisable, though I do have a warmer in the passenger seat once you are able to move up to it," Hannibal replied.

Will mumbled something in response, but he did sound tired. Hannibal drove for a while without bothering Will, but after a while Will sat up and asked to be let into the front. Hannibal obliged, pulling over and letting Will move. Will brought the blanket with him, still shivering slightly as he sat in the seat and Hannibal turned on the seat warmer. Will settled in, bundling himself tightly in the blanket and sighing when the seat had warmed up enough for it to make a difference.

"I suppose you must be hungry," Hannibal said after they had driven a bit more in silence.

They were coming close to his home, and he was nearly trembling in excitement. It was new for him. He didn't often care about other people, but he was absolutely thrilled to have Will with him.

Will hummed in agreement.

"Starving. Have been for years. I don't suppose you cook, do you?" he said good-naturedly.

Hannibal smiled softly.

"As a matter of fact, I do. I have been known to throw dinner parties, and I prepare the food myself. Do you have any dietary restrictions?"

Will huffed a soft laugh and shook his head.

“I’ll eat anything, and I probably already have. You don’t even have to be good at it. I’ll eat whatever you put in front of me,” Will said, “so literally no pressure.”

Hannibal smiled. Will spoke much more freely now, not just answering questions, but also offering conversation. It showed that he had been carefully restrained while being held prisoner by the Verger estate. It proved Will had great potential, and wasn’t irreversibly damaged by the abuse he had been through.

“Then I expect to be able to expand and refine your palate,” Hannibal replied, “though if you have any preferences for the menu, always feel free to offer suggestions.”

Will smiled to himself, staring out the window as they pulled into Hannibal’s garage. Hannibal admired the way he looked now that he was free. He seemed genuinely happy, and relaxed now that he didn’t need to worry about being harmed. Hannibal was determined to please him in any way he was able.

“If you’ll come in, I will show you around and prepare something to eat. It may be a bit early for dinner, but I would find it acceptable today, as you are in need of proper nutrition, and we have both had an eventful day.”

Will nodded and stepped out of the car with Hannibal. He kept the blanket wrapped around himself, looking delightfully like a roll of sushi. Hannibal smiled warmly and led him into the house with a hand on his back.

Hannibal led Will through a few rooms before setting him on a couch in the study. He set a fire in the fireplace and came back to where Will was sitting.

“Will, if any of your clothes are wet, you should take them off. It will help you to warm up. I will be right back with some warm clothes for you to wear, but first, would you like me to remove that?” Hannibal asked, gesturing to the collar still fixed around Will’s neck.

Will nodded silently and leaned forward to expose the buckle on the back of the thick leather.

Hannibal felt a rush of emotion at the sight, and had to calm himself slightly before he moved. When he did, he reached out and gently ran his fingers over the worn leather that had acted to imprison this amazing creature for far too long. He brushed a few dark curls away from the collar and found the cold metal of the buckle with his fingertips. He dreaded the necessary tightening of the collar for the moment it would take him to unfasten the strap.

“Forgive me,” he whispered, not even making the conscious decision to speak.

Will swallowed, his skin pressing momentarily harder against the leather.

Hannibal pulled gently and maneuvered the strap out of the buckle as quickly but gently as he could manage. He pulled the collar away and dropped it to the floor, studying the abused flesh underneath.

Will shivered lightly, probably feeling slightly exposed and chilled, but he didn't pull away or sit back up now that he was free. He seemed to be waiting to see what Hannibal would do.

Hannibal let his fingertips brush over the bruises and abrasions, feeling anger burn deep in his gut. No one should treat Will Graham this way.

Hannibal was already close to Will, and it only took a slight tip forward to press his lips gently to the flesh of Will's throat, feeling how cold he had grown and how he trembled almost imperceptibly. Will smelled like freshly turned earth under the sweat and scents from the Verger estate. Hannibal wanted to scrub everything else away so he could just smell Will.

Will pulled back, tugging the blanket tighter around him and blushing darkly. He even tucked his legs up and lifted his shoulders so his head was buried in the blanket except for his dark curls. He mumbled something, but it was too muffled to be coherent.

Hannibal sighed softly and stood up.

"My apologies, Will. I'll not act that way again. I'll return with fresh clothes for you, and then I'll leave you to prepare dinner."

Hannibal didn't wait for a response, picking up the collar and closing the door behind him. He frowned at himself as he walked up the stairs to find something for Will to wear.

He should have known better. Will had only been treated with anger and disrespect for longer than Hannibal knew. He wasn't ready to really experience affection like that. It would be akin to culture shock, and Hannibal should have known he would retreat inside himself.

Chapter End Notes

Hiatus is over! I'll be updating on schedule, and responding to comments as I normally do now. I've gotten a lot of writing done over my break, and I'm excited to share it all. <3

5

Chapter Summary

Mostly cute fluff

Will buried himself into the thick nest of blankets, sighing happily in the sweater and thick woolen socks Hannibal had given him. He had moved to the floor to be closer to the fire after he had changed out of the wet clothes, and Hannibal had piled blankets around him without him even asking.

For the first time Will could remember, he felt cared for. He felt like he didn't need to worry about what would happen the next day, and he could actually relax.

Will even allowed himself to doze off, falling so deeply asleep that he didn't rouse until Hannibal shook him gently awake.

Will blinked up at the man and pulled further into the blankets instinctively. He still had the habits of someone who had been abused, and he internally cringed at the realization. Hannibal probably knew it too, but Will still felt bad for reacting to the man like that.

"Here," Hannibal said softly, offering Will a bowl of something that steamed and smelled absolutely divine, "you really must eat, and I thought, given your low temperature, this would be most beneficial."

Will hummed and sat up to take the bowl. The warmth seeped into his fingers and he sighed happily just from holding it. He pulled the blankets up so they still covered most of him while he took his first spoonful.

Will moaned shamelessly as the thick liquid filled his mouth and spread over his tongue. It was the most delicious thing he had ever tasted, and it warmed him from the inside out just from one bite.

Hannibal smiled faintly as he watched.

"It's beef stew," he offered, without Will having to ask, "something hearty and warm. Perfect for cold weather and a healthy appetite."

Will nodded energetically, scooping more of the absolutely heavenly food into his mouth. He nearly inhaled the entire bowl, humming and licking his lips of any stray drops. He could see that Hannibal was enjoying witnessing his enjoyment, and he was glad he could offer at least that much to the man who had saved his life.

“I have a few spare rooms,” Hannibal said, “would you prefer one near to my own room, or further away?”

Will shuddered at the thought of being alone again. He knew what would happen if he woke up in a dark room all alone. He lifted his hands and brought them together flat, hoping Hannibal would understand. He was curiously finding himself unable to speak, and he didn’t dare try to explain what he meant with words.

“You would prefer one near my room?” Hannibal guessed, not giving any hint that he was frustrated by Will’s nonverbal attempt at communication.

Will bit his lip and sighed. He shook his head and reached out. He gripped the fabric of Hannibal’s suit and pulled him closer, trying to show what he meant. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath, trying to figure out how to communicate properly if he couldn’t speak.

“You do not want to be alone,” Hannibal whispered, almost in wonder.

Will opened his eyes, feeling relief fill him at hearing the words spoken aloud. He nodded, but he didn’t dare look up to meet Hannibal’s eyes. He was asking so much of the man who had already done virtually everything for him. He just didn’t have anyone else. He let go of Hannibal’s suit and pulled the blankets up around his shoulders, feeling his face grow warm despite still feeling chilled to the bone.

Hannibal plucked Will’s bowl from his hand and stood up.

“There is no reason to be afraid, Will,” Hannibal said softly, “You are welcome to ask me for anything, and I will do my best to provide it. I think you would like some more stew, though. Am I correct in thinking so?”

Will nodded, feeling better after the one bowl, but not sated yet. The mere thought of more of the miraculous sustenance had his mouth nearly watering.

Hannibal left the room again, and Will felt the slight pang of panic at being left alone. He measured his breaths and reminded himself that he was safe here, and Hannibal would be right back. There was no reason to worry. There was no reason to be afraid.

Hannibal returned, and Will smiled thankfully to him when he accepted the fresh bowl of warm stew. He ate it slower this time, savoring the rich flavors and absolutely delightful warmth it provided. He was extremely relieved when Hannibal sat on the floor next to him instead of leaving again.

Once he was done, Hannibal took the bowl from him once again, but Will caught his wrist before he could walk away. Hannibal peered at him questioningly, but made no move to pull away.

Will ducked his head sheepishly, but shoved the blankets away and stood on shaky legs to follow him.

Hannibal frowned and shook his head.

“Will. You still need to raise your core temperature. You have been too cold for far too long. I insist you stay here and warm up.”

Will shook his head, biting his lip and trying not to shake with worry. He felt like his entire body was just a vessel to contain anxiety, and it was failing to. He tried to think of some way to express what he needed, but he was falling short. He regretted now more than ever that he had never learned sign language beyond the bare minimum and breakfast foods.

Hannibal took his free hand and wrapped his fingers gently around Will’s wrist, his expression soft.

“Even now, you fear being alone?” he asked gently.

Will shuddered a sigh, nodding. He nearly collapsed with relief, finding himself unable to stop nodding. He felt like his entire body was shaking, and then he realized it *was* .

Hannibal set aside the bowl and put his hands to either side of Will’s face. He held him still, and Will felt his warm hands on his neck and cheeks. He didn’t want them to ever leave. He felt so warm and held in that moment. He didn’t want the moment to end.

“Will, are you alright?” Hannibal asked, concern bleeding through his words, “can you understand me?”

Will sighed, stilling himself and closing his eyes.

“Yes,” Will managed, though his voice felt raw and the words came out scratchy.

Hannibal nodded. He held onto Will for another moment before he dropped his hands. He picked the bowl back up and made no objection when Will followed him to the kitchen. Will watched as Hannibal washed the dishes by hand and then dried them and put them away. Hannibal moved with a sort of natural grace that made Will stare without meaning to. He was just comfortable in his skin the way Will never had been.

He envied it.

Will walked with nearly silent steps as he followed Hannibal through the house. He was like a ghost, or a fantasy. He didn’t speak, and he just watched with his soft blue eyes as Hannibal tidied up.

Hannibal was tempted to postpone heading to bed, if only to avoid any awkwardness as he tried to accommodate Will. He didn’t want to make Will uncomfortable in any way, but he feared what would happen as they tried to work around each other.

Hannibal decided not to procrastinate, knowing the anticipation would only increase and become torture. Not to mention, Will needed to sleep in a warm bed, sooner rather than later.

He made his way to the bedroom and turned down the covers. Will didn’t even hesitate to slip in and curl up on the side Hannibal didn’t usually enter on. He probably knew that, from

some small bit of evidence. He was incredibly clever, and he was trained in forensics.

Hannibal watched as Will buried himself under the covers until just the top of his ears and the top of his head were poking out above them. It was incredibly endearing, and Hannibal felt warmth in his chest at the sight.

He dressed for bed and slid in under the covers leaving a space between them for Will's comfort. Before Hannibal knew what was happening, he felt Will's still slightly chilled body move and press up against his side. Will's nose brushed against Hannibal's nightshirt, and he took a deep breath, though his eyes were closed.

Will looked so pleased and relaxed, and Hannibal had to hold his breath for fear he would disappear or decide to move away. He slowly began to take shallow breaths, as quietly as he could, and Will seemed to fall asleep almost instantly. His knees were curled up towards his chest and they were pressed gently into Hannibal's hip. Hannibal burned at every point where Will touched him, and he idly considered that it would help Will to raise his core temperature.

In the morning, if Will was still too cold, Hannibal would have to treat him for hypothermia, but for now, he could just close his eyes and sleep. He knew Will was safe, and he was there with Hannibal.

Will woke up, still curled into Hannibal's side.

He hadn't really thought before he had moved close to the other man. He had just felt a large source of heat in the bed with him and had moved to be closer to it.

Now, in the morning, still feeling sated from the food and refreshed from a good night's sleep, he looked at Hannibal and blushed at the thought of sharing a bed with him.

It hadn't been lost on Will that Hannibal was incredibly attractive. He just hadn't really had the chance to consider it before this moment, and now he felt terribly unsure of what to do. He didn't want to move and risk waking the man prematurely, but he didn't know what it would look like if he was awake and just sitting there when he awoke.

Will didn't have long to wonder, because, as he was considering his options, the man opened his eyes and looked down at Will with a peculiarly blank expression.

Will hurried to move away, nearly falling off the other side of the bed as he did. He looked down rather than at Hannibal's face, and he felt his own face heat up with embarrassment. He shrank into himself, feeling Hannibal's gaze on him as he did.

"You needn't be afraid, Will," Hannibal assured him softly, sitting up in bed and stretching, "I am not likely to become upset with you for anything you may do. I find myself peculiarly endeared to you in a way I have only experienced once before. Would you like some breakfast?"

Will nodded, still not making eye contact with Hannibal. Hannibal didn't seem to mind, merely nodding and stepping out of the bed to ready himself for the day. Will didn't dare move, just watching as Hannibal stood up and walked over to his closet.

The man could actually walk into the closet, proving again how different his life was from any Will had ever known. He perused his options like they were on store racks, showing he owned enough clothes to furnish a boutique. Will had never understood how people could own so many clothes, or why they would choose to. He had never needed that much variety, though he supposed he hadn't exactly had a social life either, so he probably wasn't in the position to justify judging others based on their wardrobe.

"Do you drink coffee?" Hannibal asked casually, "I own a French press, but would be remiss to use it if you do not enjoy coffee. I suppose you might not have had the opportunity for it much in the last while, but the offer is there all the same."

Will took a deep breath and sat up in the bed. He shivered when the blankets fell away and the cold air hit him again. He saw Hannibal frown upon noticing it, but neither said anything.

"I used to have an addiction to coffee, actually," Will said, finding it easier to speak this morning, "and I went through withdrawals after the family took me. Luckily I survived them. I'd love some good coffee, though, if you have it."

Hannibal smiled softly.

"Good is a subjective term, though I do enjoy mine enough," he answered, "I think you are in need of a warm bath this morning. I can see you are still a bit chilled. I dread to think what might happen if we cannot increase your core temperature."

Hannibal walked over to the connected bathroom, now dressed in a three-piece suit. He fished around for a moment before producing a thermometer and returning to the bed. He sat down next to Will and motioned for Will to come closer.

Will shifted in the bed and moved so he was nearly up against Hannibal again. He could feel the warmth radiating from Hannibal's skin, and he wanted to lean into it again. He had enough restraint now to keep himself from indulging, but it was a close call.

Hannibal lifted the thermometer with one hand and placed the other gently along Will's jaw. His thumb sat on Will's chin, just brushing his lower lip, and Hannibal pulled slightly to open Will's mouth. Will obliged, and Hannibal carefully placed the thermometer under his tongue.

Will couldn't help but stare at Hannibal as he did all this, soaking up every detail of his face. The line of his brow and the curve of his lips. Will felt entranced, and couldn't make himself look away.

When Hannibal took the thermometer from his mouth, Will saw the slight turn of his lips as he frowned. He wasn't pleased with what he saw.

"A warm bath it is," Hannibal decided, standing up and walking back to the bathroom to replace the thermometer and to draw a bath, apparently, "you are just shy of an acceptable

temperature. I'll provide you with more clothes, and then I will leave you to it. I need to make breakfast for us both."

Will nodded, feeling a bit dazed at the idea of having an actual bath. He had just been hosed down for the most part while in the family's care, and scrubbed down, handcuffed, while on the Verger estate. It was almost inconceivable to him to have an actual bath, alone and at his leisure.

Hannibal left the water running as he returned to the closet, presumably to find something to let Will wear for the day. He returned with a folded set of clothes and set them on the bathroom counter before he turned off the water and put out a towel for Will to use as well.

Hannibal walked back through the bedroom and gave Will a polite nod before he went to prepare breakfast.

Finding himself alone, and a warm bath just through the doorway, Will jumped up and walked to the bathroom. The water was steaming, and it smelled like fancy soaps. Will thought it was one of the best things he had smelled in ages. He closed the door to the bedroom and shed his clothes.

The water was wonderful, and Will sank into it with a deep sigh. Nothing had felt so amazing before in his life.

For a long time, all Will did was sit in the water, feeling the chill seep out of his bones and the warmth return to his muscles. He didn't ever remember being so warm. He was pretty sure he was in heaven, if heaven existed.

There was a gorgeous man making him breakfast, he was warm, he was fed, and he was safe. He could not imagine being any happier at that moment. Everything was too good to be true, making him aware that there must be a catch somewhere, meaning none of it was.

But Will didn't concern himself with what might be wrong just then. He was warm and happy, and refused to let anything ruin that.

6

Hannibal enjoyed cooking. It was like meditation for him. It helped him to relax and clear his mind.

And he *needed* to clear his mind after waking up that morning.

Will had looked nearly *edible* in the morning light, curled up into Hannibal's side and ruffled from sleep. He had new color in his cheeks from the food and rest, and his eyes had been clear and bright.

Hannibal had seen Will's hesitance to be seen like that, and had honored his wishes as best he could. He had not allowed himself to lose control, despite the temptation it had been. He had shown Will respect, and hoped it had been received well.

Only time would tell.

Hannibal plated the food, and was about to check on Will when he smelled the man approach. He smelled clean, though unmistakably like fresh earth. Hannibal knew he was there before Will spoke.

"Can I help at all?" Will asked, his voice soft and unsure.

Hannibal turned to see Will, standing in the doorway with his head ducked down. His hair was damp, making the curls more pronounced, and Will let them fall down in front of his eyes as he shuffled awkwardly.

"Of course," Hannibal replied pleasantly, "the third drawer, to the right of the sink, is where you will find the silverware. We will each need a fork, if you will. Would you like to eat in the study so we may sit at the fire?"

Will's shoulders dropped as his muscles relaxed. He seemed relieved, and he nodded. He spared a glance up to smile at Hannibal, and Hannibal returned it.

It was progress, at least. Hannibal didn't expect things to go perfectly now that Will was free, and here. He knew Will would have habits and traumas that would need to be worked through, but he must have Will's trust if anything were to improve.

Hannibal took up a tray carrying their bowls of protein scramble and coffee, and began heading into the study. He heard the slide of the drawer as Will retrieved their forks, and the nearly silent footsteps as Will followed him down the hall in the thick woolen socks Hannibal had made sure to provide him.

Will found his place in the nest of blankets Hannibal had left in front of the fireplace the night before, and Hannibal started the fire up again. Will hummed happily when Hannibal gave him a bowl, exchanging it for one of the forks.

Hannibal watched as Will took a bite of the food and closed his eyes with pleasure. Will let out a soft hum of enjoyment, and Hannibal couldn't help but smile. Will ate more slowly this morning, taking his time and being as neat and polite as he could. Hannibal appreciated the consideration, though he hadn't been at all offended by the way Will had wolfed down the stew the night before.

Hannibal ate his own, though still more slowly than Will did. A European habit, he had found. Americans hadn't always had time to enjoy their food, and the generations had learned to eat quickly when they could. Of course, there were still some people who were able to eat properly, mostly in higher society, but they had likely been taught to by someone else. It just didn't occur to most Americans to chew as long as they should.

"You weren't lying when you said you can cook," Will mentioned after a few minutes of eating, "I've never eaten anything so delicious as your food in my entire life. Even Cordell, Mason's personal chef, can't hold a candle to this."

Hannibal smiled and bowed his head in thanks. He was familiar with Cordell's work. He was a man who was overly proud, and didn't deserve to be.

Hannibal put his bowl aside and reached toward Will slowly.

"If I may," he said gently.

He waited for Will to nod his consent before he slid his hand up under Will's curls to feel his forehead.

Will was the proper temperature, not feverish or cold. That was good.

Hannibal sighed in relief and pulled his hand away to continue eating his breakfast.

"I think the worst has passed, at least concerning your health," he said, "But be sure to tell me if you feel ill in any manner in the next while. I would regret having you come to any harm while in my care."

Will nodded, though he frowned. He worried over his breakfast for a few minutes before he broke the silence to voice his concern.

"What are we going to do now?" he asked, his voice soft and afraid.

Hannibal refused to show any concern for the future, taking another bite as he considered it.

"Well, I believe you would have a hard time trying to reintegrate yourself into society on your own. There are likely quite a few organizations that are aware of your existence, and would like nothing more than to… possess you, in whatever fashion. I would be more than happy to accommodate you for as long as you need. Anything you need or desire, I would like to provide for you. I hope you do not feel you are any inconvenience. I have already grown to enjoy your presence, and would be pleased to have you here for as long as you wish to stay."

Will closed his eyes and nodded. He didn't seem to entirely believe Hannibal, but he didn't argue with him about it. He just continued to eat, turning to stare into the crackling fire. He chewed on his lip and seemed to worry over whatever his imagination was conjuring to torment him with.

Hannibal wished he knew what to say to comfort the man, but he didn't. He didn't have a clue. It was odd for him to feel so at a loss. There was one thing he thought might make Will at least a bit pleased.

"You may read whichever books you wish," Hannibal stated, watching Will for a reaction.

Will's ears twitched, almost the way a horse or rabbit would when they heard something that didn't pose a threat. Taking note of the disturbance in the air rather than being frightened. The movement caused a few curls to shift around his ears, magnifying the action. His head turned, just a fraction, and Hannibal took that as a sign of his interest.

"The books in this room are only a portion of the ones I own," Hannibal continued, "and if there is one you would like, I would be happy to procure it for you. I would like you to entertain yourself, reading as much as your mind can hold, and perhaps we could discuss your thoughts. I find intelligent conversation hard to come by, and would be pleased to speak with you about whatever you wish."

The corners of Will's mouth tipped up in a smile, though his gaze was still distant. He was not smiling about what Hannibal had said. He was amused by something else. Hannibal wondered what he might have thought of that was amusing in that moment.

"Thank you," Will said, though he didn't turn to look at Hannibal.

Hannibal nodded, satisfied for the moment. They ate in companionable silence, each observing something. Hannibal was observing Will, and Will was observing everything other than Hannibal. In a way, Hannibal supposed that would be a fairly effective way of observing him without the added variable of his unpredictable honesty.

He admired Will for that. No matter what Will did, he seemed to do it well, and with singular focus. Will didn't split up his attention between things, as far as Hannibal could tell. He would devote himself entirely to whatever he had set his mind to, and it seemed to serve him well. Despite having been imprisoned, Will had twice found a way to turn the tables around on his captors. Perhaps more times, though Hannibal only knew of the two.

"You know, I probably really should see a psychiatrist," Will mused, breaking the spell of silence that had enveloped them.

Hannibal tipped his head curiously.

"And why do you say that?" he asked.

Will smiled softly to himself.

“My imagination can sometimes get the better of me, but sometimes I let it. Maybe that’s just a side effect of everything, but I have had entire conversations with you in my mind,” he related, as if telling a story, “and the strangest thing is, I know exactly what you would say to me in every instance I dreamt up.”

Hannibal was fascinated. He leaned forward slightly, staring unabashedly at Will’s face. Will still hadn’t looked over to him, and the fire cast dynamic shadows over the side of his face from where Hannibal could see. Will didn’t look particularly disturbed by what he was saying, though of course that was no indication of actual mental stability.

“Do you,” Hannibal mused, not feeling quite as skeptical as perhaps he should have at the news, “what kinds of instances did you dream up for me to talk to you?”

Will took a deep breath in, closing his eyes so his eyelashes fluttered against his cheeks. He tipped his head back, a faint smile echoing in his features.

“There was one very similar to this,” Will confided, “Where we were comfortable in the company of each other, and you wished for me to read, and learn, so we could have conversations more on the level you prefer.”

Hannibal opened his mouth to object, wanting to assure Will he hadn’t meant any offense at the offer. He didn’t mean that Will wasn’t good enough or smart enough.

Will stopped the words by opening his eyes and fixing Hannibal with an amused look.

“I know what you meant by it, Doctor. I’m not offended. You shouldn’t forget that I will always know your intentions when you speak or act. It’s my curse,” Will said, smiling sadly, “but I suppose it can be helpful at times. I know it is certainly useful, as so many have proved to me before. I suppose you own the works of Shakespeare?”

The last comment was paired with Will shyly chewing on his lip, turning his eyes down again.

Hannibal smiled.

“I do,” he said, “would you like to begin with them, or were you only asking because of my previous use of his works to speak with you?”

Will huffed a soft laugh, his cheeks turning slightly pink. He looked beautiful in the firelight. Hannibal couldn’t help but stare a bit at the wonderful sight before him.

“I think it was a clever game, Doctor, and it would be better if I were able to match your familiarity with the material. I have an eidetic memory, so I should be able to catch up pretty soon.”

Hannibal grinned. He nodded softly and stood up.

As it happened, his collection of Shakespeare works were held on a shelf in that room. He kept them near his desk for easy reference if he was ever writing and had the urge to quote

the man. As trustworthy as his memory was, he preferred to be absolutely sure about such things.

Hannibal stood for a moment, scanning over the titles of his collection. He wondered what Will would enjoy, having not been given a request just yet. Will had already shown an appreciation for Much Ado About Nothing, though he was also apparently intimately familiar with it as well. Hannibal wanted to give him something new, or at least not as familiar to him.

“Would you like to begin with Twelfth Night, Will, or do you have a different preference?” Hannibal asked, pulling the mentioned story down and idly flipping through the pages.

Will lifted his eyes to where Hannibal stood. He nearly glowed with interest, which made Hannibal force himself to stay where he was and not scoop the man up and do something rash. He knew he needed to take things slowly with someone who had been so mistreated.

“I have never read Twelfth Night,” Will replied, his curiosity bleeding through his words, “and I trust your opinion on such matters. Whatever you choose, might I also borrow Much Ado? I’m in the habit of reading more than one book at once, or at least I was when I was in the possession of books.”

Hannibal felt a dull ache at the thought that Will had once owned his own books, that life had ripped from him. He had probably had copies of books that had been gifted to him, or held sentimental value. He had likely owned many things that had been important to him, and now he would never see them again.

“Of course, Will,” Hannibal replied, taking down that book as well to carry over, “I only ask you treat them well while you are reading them. I take great pride in the condition of my things.”

Will blinked, glancing up at Hannibal as he was handed the two books. He didn’t hold his gaze, tearing it back down meekly and just admiring the books as he ran his hand over the covers. Hannibal could already tell he cared for books as much, or even more, than himself. He didn’t have any reason to worry they would be damaged.

“I wouldn’t think of hurting them,” Will mumbled, almost to himself, his eyes still caressing the books as if they were something precious to him, “Thank you very much, Doctor Lecter.”

Hannibal smiled softly, sitting back down and taking a sip of his coffee as he watched Will lovingly turn to the first page of Twelfth Night.

“I would very much like it if you would call me Hannibal,” he said, feeling it was not too much to ask at this point, “unless you would prefer me to call you mister Graham.”

Will looked up and scrunched his nose in a manner that was almost childish.

“No. I’ll call you Hannibal. I just didn’t know what you preferred. I feel I owe you too much to presume anything,” Will confessed, turning his eyes back down bashfully.

Hannibal found his mannerisms endearing, though he would very much have liked Will to be more confident with himself. Will had a brilliant mind, and it deserved to be cultivated and displayed like anything else of great beauty. He would have Will be confident, though he knew it would take time.

Perhaps it was a very good thing Hannibal was trained in psychology. He was well adapted to aid Will in his new becoming. Where Will would become what he always should have been.

“You do not owe me anything,” Hannibal dismissed, “I have done everything up to this point because I wished to. I rather think I would have freed you from Mason without your consent, though it does please me to have it.”

Will laughed, and he sounded genuinely happy. It wasn’t as light and soft as the laughter Hannibal had heard from him before. It was rich and full, and made Hannibal fiercely vow to himself that Will would never again suffer as he had already.

“I knew you were a good one when I saw you,” Will said, setting the books aside to finish his coffee and breakfast, “but I didn’t expect this level of chivalry. Are you just prone to doing good works, or am I special?”

There was a hint of mischief in Will’s words, and Hannibal smiled.

“What do you believe, Will?” he asked, teasing, but still curious.

Will gave him a sideways glance, narrowing his eyes warily.

“I already know you had no plans to step in to stop Mason from doing any of his terrible things until you spoke to me,” Will reminded him, “and I do have some level of intuition when it comes to the substance of one’s character. I know you are not typically a good man, but you are better than most.”

Hannibal raised his eyebrows, surprised at that. He hadn’t expected to be told he was better than anyone, much less “most”. He was even more curious, now, after having been given his answer.

“What makes you say that?” he asked.

Will speared the last bit of sausage from his bowl, lifting his fork up to study it idly. It was the last bite of his breakfast, and he hummed thoughtfully as he put his words together.

“I told you I’ve eaten just about everything, Hannibal,” he said casually, “and I know what beef tastes like. I thought it impolite to mention when I was eating the stew. You have a unique taste, I’ll give you that.”

Hannibal blinked, once again surprised by this beautiful creature before him. Will Graham was the most wonderful, but incredibly dangerous, thing Hannibal had ever allowed into his life. Much less invited willingly.

“You are familiar with my unique tastes, then,” Hannibal said, still craving more answers from Will.

Will popped the last bite of food into his mouth and chewed, not showing any hesitation or disgust for the identity of the substance.

“I at least know you don’t just kill at random. You have a method, though I know the authorities will never put the pieces together. You’re lucky I’m where I am now. I was on a path to being a profiler in the FBI if the family hadn’t collared me so quick. I would be on your tail, and I may be the only person clever enough to catch you.”

Hannibal was ready to admit that was the truth. He had never met, nor even heard of, anyone with Will’s abilities. Never, in all his years partaking in his hobbies, had he met anyone who had seen him so clearly.

Will Graham belonged to Hannibal now. He had not necessarily planned to keep him around long when he had decided to liberate him, but Hannibal would never let Will leave now. No matter what happened, Will was his, in whatever capacity he must have him in.

“I believe you,” Hannibal admitted, “what do you intend to do with the information, now that you have it?”

Will laughed again, shaking his head. His curls swirled around his head in stunning waves. There was nothing about Will that was not beautiful.

“I couldn’t do anything with it if I wanted to,” he said, “but you don’t have anything to worry about. I’ve long ago abandoned any ideas of morality concerning this kind of thing. Despite what you may say, I owe you, and I like you too much to try anything. It would be rude of me to try to get you arrested after you saved my life.”

The last statement was spoken with a slight emphasis on the word ‘rude’, and Will huffed a soft laugh to himself, as if it was some joke that only he understood.

Hannibal smiled as well, feeling understood by Will.

“I find rudeness unspeakably ugly,” He replied calmly, “of all the sins mankind has gifted itself with, the least we can do is be polite to one another.”

Will chuckled.

“You certainly have a peculiar philosophy, Hannibal. Maybe it says something about me that I find myself agreeing with you. Maybe I have been changed by my years in captivity, or maybe this has been more than one kind of liberation for me.”

Will turned and studied Hannibal, seeming to be looking for an answer. Hannibal didn’t reply, waiting to see what Will would do next.

After a moment, Will slowly smiled.

“I think it’s good that we met, Hannibal,” he said at last, “you’ve helped me, and I’m beginning to think I’ll be able to help you.”

Hannibal raised an eyebrow at that.

“Whatever with?” he asked.

Will stretched, looking almost like a cat warming in the sun.

“You’ll see,” he purred, completing the illusion, “but if I tell you now, it won’t work.”

Hannibal wasn’t sure how to respond to that, but Will was curling up in the blankets, opening one of the books, and he didn’t want to interrupt him. Hannibal just watched Will read for a few minutes before he picked up the dishes they had both used and carried them to the kitchen.

Will was a bit frustrated. Both with himself, and with Hannibal.

They had spoken of love and attraction before even agreeing that Will would escape the Verger estate, but now they seemed to both be pretending that had never happened.

Hannibal was probably being delicate with Will, having seen him in a fragile state. Perhaps he thought Will had only spoken those words in order to gain his help in escaping. Maybe he hadn’t meant the words he had said to Will, having only replied to Will’s words and matched his conversational tone in order to earn his trust.

They were now engaged in some sort of dance around each other, where they seemed to be trying to keep the distance between them exactly as it is. They would not move closer, nor would they move apart.

It was torturous.

Will was concocting a plan, though. He knew Hannibal was curious, but he was very, very good at not giving anything away when he didn’t want to.

One thing that Will was definitely planning to use to his advantage was the fact that Hannibal had not yet told him to sleep in a guest room. He was going to overstay his welcome in Hannibal’s bed if he had to, but he didn’t think it would come to that.

7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“I was considering the fact that you do not have any clothes of your own,” Hannibal said, placing a sandwich in front of Will for lunch, “and I thought I would like to take you out to buy something.”

Will frowned, chewing on his lip nervously. He wasn’t sure he was ready for that kind of thing yet, but he did feel bad about using Hannibal’s clothes every day.

“Don’t you think that’s a bit risky?” he asked, “I mean, me being seen in public? What if Mason comes after me?”

Hannibal smiled reassuringly.

“Mason is already aware of where you are, I’m sure,” he replied, “but I am quite convincing when I want to be. He will not attempt to take you again. Any concern we should have is about who else might know of you and be able to recognize you. I have confidence I will be able to protect you.”

Will blushed lightly and ducked his head as he took a bite of the sandwich. He was fully aware of Hannibal’s unique set of skills, though the man hadn’t told him outright. People didn’t just tell someone else to feed their face to their own dogs without having some experience with that kind of thing.

Will was getting used to eating actual meals, and regularly, but he didn’t think he would ever get over how insanely good everything Hannibal made was. Even being made with human meat.

“Alright then,” he said after a moment, “what kind of clothes were you thinking of?”

Hannibal hummed in consideration, watching Will. Will felt his eyes on him like melted wax.

“Some that fit you properly, to begin with,” Hannibal answered thoughtfully, “though the styles will be up to you, of course. I do not know your preferences.”

Will glanced up at the man. Hannibal didn’t seem concerned about anything. He had the air of a man who didn’t have a care in the world. He certainly didn’t seem like the kind of person who had a target on his back, or was housing someone who men had actually died to get their hands on.

No, Hannibal looked like the only thing he ever really worried about was his dry-cleaning or something of that sort.

It was… oddly comforting, actually. Will could draw on his calm, and allow it to dilute his own fears.

“I used to wear mostly flannels and jeans,” Will confessed, continuing to eat, “but I think it’d be fun to take you up on the offer of reintegrating me into society. That means I’ll need to start dressing like I belong in the society you’re in, rather than how I used to. Unless, of course, you don’t want to bring me with you places. I understand that too.”

Will felt himself flush with nervousness. Hannibal was a high society person, and Will had lived his college years working as a repairman. They were not the same kind of person, and he probably shouldn’t have even considered that Hannibal would bring him anywhere.

As if reading Will’s mind, Hannibal reached across the table and took his hand gently. Will looked up and met his eyes, seeing that Hannibal was smiling softly.

“I would like nothing more than to be seen in your company,” he said seriously, “and I would be honored if you would allow me to help you choose a few suits for yourself.”

Will was probably as red as was physically possible for a human being, but he just nodded, swallowing hard.

“That sounds good,” he answered, his voice trembling a bit.

Will hadn’t warned Hannibal that he had never actually been to a real tailor. He had thought it would be obvious. Hannibal didn’t seem to have given it much thought, or it was just incomprehensible to him that someone would have made it into adulthood without having been to a tailor. Either way, Will felt as out of place as a penguin in the Sahara.

Hannibal spoke in hushed tones to the tailor as Will tried on different styles and colors. He felt like some pig at a fair, being poked and prodded and shown off. One small mercy was that there was not a large audience. It was just Hannibal, the tailor, and what Will had concluded was some sort of an intern.

Will had almost forgotten about the brand on his back before he saw the tailor’s eyes widen as he helped Will out of one shirt and into another. Will paled, wondering if the man would recognize the emblem, if he was one of the people loyal to the Verger estate, or if he would say something to Hannibal about it.

Will turned to the tailor to try to explain, but the man shook his head and told him it didn’t matter.

Will wasn’t sure that was true, and he still felt the urge to make sure the man didn’t have any misconceptions about him, but he shut his mouth and continued through the rest of the outing. The tailor didn’t ask him, and Will didn’t see Hannibal react to anything he said poorly, so he guessed he didn’t say anything to him either. Will felt like the brand was fresh again, his body reacting to it like it was still burning. It itched, and felt too warm. He hated it.

Hannibal ordered a total of five suits for Will at the end of the appointment, and then took Will to what looked like an extremely upscale clothing store in order to buy him some more casual clothes.

Hannibal found some flannels, though Will was sure they were made of something much more high quality than actual flannel. They were obscenely soft. When Hannibal insisted he try one on to be sure they had the size right and he would actually enjoy wearing them, he found that the fabric didn't catch on the burned edges of the brand, and it didn't rub harshly against his skin.

"How does it feel?" Hannibal asked, walking in a circle around Will to see the shirt from every angle.

"Expensive," Will replied honestly, "you know we could always go to Walmart to get my street clothes. I don't care that much about it."

Hannibal frowned.

"I would never do you the disservice," he said, sounding more serious about it than Will thought was strictly necessary, "you deserve items of quality, and I am certainly no worse off for it. Don't concern yourself with the price. Quality is far more important to me."

Will knew that was the truth. It was in stark contrast to the Vergers, who owned anything expensive, regardless of quality. Hannibal actually had the knowledge and passion to choose items that were worth the money he spent on them. Even the ingredients of the food reflected the difference between tastes. Will found he preferred Hannibal's to the Vergers', regardless of their other choices.

"Okay," Will sighed, "does it look fine? I've never been very good at giving my opinion on clothes."

Hannibal nodded sharply and turned to choose more shirts of the same size and make as Will changed back into the sweater he had been wearing. He pulled it back on, looking at himself in the mirror, and feeling a pang of regret at the idea that he wouldn't have an excuse to wear Hannibal's clothes after today.

Will had never been the kind of person who had given much thought to wearing someone else's clothes, but he felt wearing Hannibal's clothes every day was sort of intimate and pleasant. It was like he belonged to Hannibal, and he was being taken care of. It wasn't the same kind of possession that the family or Mason had had over Will. It was more of a mutual agreement. Reciprocated ownership.

Emerging from the changing room, Will was startled to see Hannibal engaged in conversation with another man. The man stood with a peculiar tilt, as if he wanted to look carefree. Will thought it made him look silly, like he was on the verge of falling over. He also had the look of a man who held himself in high esteem, and considered everyone either his equal or his subordinate.

Will walked over cautiously, still not feeling confident that Hannibal would like to be seen with him.

When Will was standing at Hannibal's elbow, his gaze down and his shoulders pulled up to his ears, Hannibal turned to him.

“Will, there you are. This is Fredrick Chilton. Fredrick, this is Will Graham.”

Will glanced up to offer a polite smile to the man, and was met with a confused expression. If he had been asked in that moment what Fredrick Chilton thought of him, he would say the man was very nearly disgusted by him.

“A pleasure to meet you,” Chilton said hesitantly, “but what are you doing with Doctor Lecter, may I ask?”

Will didn’t answer, feeling like it would be better if Hannibal were to guide the conversation at the moment.

“Will is a dear friend of mine,” Hannibal replied smoothly, “but he has recently come into a bit of misfortune. His home and most of his belongings were lost in a fire. I have offered to help him until he can get back on his feet.”

Will sighed in relief. It was a good lie, and a story that would explain a lot of things about their situation at the moment. He allowed himself to straighten up a bit and look at Chilton’s tie rather than his shoes.

Fredrick blinked in surprise, turning back to Will with a cautious smile.

“Well, how lucky you must be to have a friend like Doctor Lecter,” he said, “I’m just surprised to have never met, or even heard of you before.”

“There should be some things in my life I am allowed to have to myself,” Hannibal replied pleasantly, “and Will tends to be displeased with people who have a history of psychiatry. He is not fond of being psychoanalyzed.”

Will looked over Chilton again. He didn’t look like a psychiatrist, or at least not a good one. He looked more like a travelling salesman, or a guy from a toothpaste commercial.

“Oh, I’ve heard that before,” Chilton said happily, “but you don’t need to worry about me. I turned to plastic surgery about the same time Doctor Lecter did. Great minds think alike. As good as I was at psychology, it wasn’t as rewarding as working with my hands, and I am even better at surgery.”

Will nodded, though he had already decided he did not like Chilton at all. He was all false pride and confidence. Will could tell he was talented in neither psychiatry nor surgery. He had probably just chased after Hannibal’s coattails all his life, and ended up being inferior to him in every way. Even the suit he wore showed that he wanted to be like Hannibal, though he was not capable of wearing it as well.

“Great minds think alike, but fools rarely differ,” Will replied idly, “there’s not one wise man among twenty that will praise himself.”

Chilton froze, stunned by Will’s words. He apparently hadn’t expected Will to speak at all, much less quote Shakespeare at him.

Hannibal smiled in amusement. He no doubt understood what Will meant by the words, though it was clear Chilton was ignorant of it.

“Well said,” Chilton answered slowly, “can I expect to be seeing you more often, or does Doctor Lecter intend to keep you to himself forever?”

Will glanced at Hannibal, who raised his eyebrows in response. He wanted Will to answer in whatever way he chose.

Will smiled as politely as he could.

“My nature is rather private, but I expect you will see me again. We’ll have to see what happens. Hannibal has promised to invite me out more often.”

Will had chosen his words carefully, and he could see the confusion work across Chilton’s face as he tried to decide what they meant. Hannibal placed a hand on Will’s shoulder, signaling the end of the conversation.

“Fredrick, we really must be on our way. It was good to see you. Goodbye.”

Chilton startled and called goodbye to them as they walked away, and Will sighed heavily.

“He wears his faith but as the fashion of his hat,” Will mumbled to Hannibal once Chilton was well out of earshot.

Hannibal chuckled softly. Will could tell he agreed with him about the man.

“The offense is not of such a bloody nature,” he answered smoothly, clearly used to the way Chilton was, and unconcerned with him, “but I did enjoy seeing you speak with him. You have a fire within you that shines all the brighter for your passion.”

Will scoffed.

“Composing your own verse, Doctor?” Will prodded, “I thought you only spoke using words from those who came before.”

Hannibal hummed, leading Will up to the check stand to purchase the clothes.

“All hearts in love use their own tongues,” he replied.

Will blushed a bit, not trusting himself to answer in front of the cashier. Hannibal hadn’t spoken like that since he had brought Will home with him. Will had started wondering if he still felt any attraction towards him, or if that had ended once he had seen Will in such a pitiful state as he had been in when they had finally arrived in Baltimore.

Once they were back out at the car, the clothes bundled into their arms as Hannibal motioned for Will to deposit them in the trunk, Will decided to ask.

“Tell me, where is fancy bred, in the heart or in the head?” he said, folding his arms and leaning against the car as Hannibal arranged the clothes in the trunk.

Hannibal looked up and met Will's eyes. Will stared at him, willing him to understand what he meant with the quote. Will was sure he did when Hannibal turned back to his task without answering, seeming to be considering his response.

"Our doubts are traitors, and make us lose the good we oft might win by fearing an attempt," he said, "Reason and love keep little company together nowadays."

Will felt immense relief at the confession. He had been terrified of hearing Hannibal say he had only said those things for reasons outside of truth.

"Human misery must somewhere have a stop," he replied softly, "the worst fault you have is to be in love. Come what may, I adore thee so that danger will seem sport, and I will go."

Hannibal looked up at Will. His eyes were wide with awe, and he stepped up so they were almost, but not quite touching.

"All deities reside in the human breast. I had not thought to find them all within one man," Hannibal said quietly, almost a whisper breathed against Will's skin.

Will lifted his hands and held onto the lapels of Hannibal's suit.

"Wilt thou reach stars because they shine on thee?" he asked, smiling softly.

Hannibal kissed him, the muscles in his shoulders relaxing a bit.

"At first I did adore a twinkling star, but now I worship a celestial sun," he replied.

Will grinned and pulled Hannibal into a deeper kiss. Hannibal's hands landed on Will's waist and held him close, their bodies pressing together as they breathed the same air.

Will felt as if he might catch fire from the intensity of the feelings rushing through his veins. He had spent weeks in Hannibal's company, trying to figure out if the other man felt anything toward him. Hannibal had never moved toward him in the bed, nor had he reacted when Will had moved closer to share his warmth. He had not initiated any physical contact aside from that necessary. He had been polite, and almost curt at times. Will had worried the man felt nothing.

Now, he knew he had been wrong. He knew Hannibal felt the same way as he did, and there was nothing else to worry about, as far as he was concerned. Hannibal loved him, Hannibal would protect him, and Hannibal would take care of him.

Will had never been so happy in his life.

Pulling away, Hannibal smiled at Will, a bit breathless. His pupils were blown wide, and Will idly wondered if his own were as well.

"We should be on our way home," Hannibal said, huffing a soft laugh at himself, "as much as I adore seeing you in my sweater, you have clothes of your own now, and I would think you glad to wear them."

Will huffed his own laugh at that, still holding onto Hannibal's suit.

"I actually really like the idea of wearing your clothes," he admitted, blushing a bit, "like everything I am is also you."

Will heard Hannibal's breath hitch, and the man pulled him into another kiss.

"I had thought ideas like that would have lost any allure for you after your experiences," he confessed, a bit of concern bleeding through his words.

Will nodded in understanding.

"The difference is that I *chose* you, and you aren't hurting me. You're taking care of me. The things I get from you are not begrudged, and you don't mind me being treated like your equal. Everything about this is different from them. I'm glad you would want me to be seen as yours, and you are not branding me to do so."

Hannibal blinked, then smiled.

"I had nearly forgotten about the brand," he said, "but I think I may be able to help you on that front. I am a plastic surgeon, after all. Would you like me to try taking the mark of the Verger estate away?"

Will almost gasped aloud at the idea. He couldn't believe what he was hearing. He hadn't thought it possible.

"Please."

Will was feeling immense anxiety. Hannibal assured him it was normal, but Will was pretty sure nothing about anything concerning either of them could ever be considered normal.

He resisted the urge to scratch at his bandage, knowing it would only do more harm than good. He wouldn't know how it had gone for a week still, and it was driving him crazy.

"I'll find a day to massacre them all and raze their faction and their family," Hannibal said, striding into the study and handing his tablet to Will.

Will furrowed his brow and took the tablet, welcoming the distraction from the terrible itch at his back. It was open to a news site, and it looked like an article about Mason Verger and the estate.

Hannibal walked over to stare out of the window while Will read as quickly as he could. Neither Will nor Hannibal were mentioned in the article, but it looked like Mason was attempting to send some sort of message and garner support for his poor, mangled visage. Will knew it was only a matter of time before someone came after Hannibal for what he had done.

And it was Will's fault.

“You should give me back,” Will said softly, feeling it was the only option at this point. He shivered at the thought, knowing what would happen if he ever went back to the estate.

“Out of the question,” Hannibal snapped, looking much more tense than he even had when orchestrating Will’s escape.

Will frowned and shook his head.

“Listen, it’s great that you did this for me, and I’ll always be grateful for it, but you can’t seriously just let yourself be a sitting duck for these people. If I go back, I might be able to convince Mason to leave you alone. I’m really persuasive when I want to be. It’s the only hope we have to get him off your back.”

“Enough,” Hannibal snapped again, “I’ll not have him set his filthy gaze on you once more as long as I live.”

Will stood to face Hannibal, setting his jaw stubbornly.

“I know my price, I am worth no worse a place,” he said, tipping his chin up defiantly.

Hannibal scowled darkly.

“Human misery must somewhere have a stop,” he shot back, “When you depart from me, sorrow abides and happiness takes his leave. I’ll not abandon you to destruction.”

“The miserable have no other medicine but only hope. I’ve hope to live, and am prepared to die,” Will said stubbornly, “All that lives must die, passing through nature into eternity. Let me go, so you can keep being who you are without the danger.”

Hannibal snarled.

“You speak an infinite deal of nothing,” he said, turning sharply and walking to his desk, “Give me the daggers, the sleeping and the dead are but as pictures. I wasted time, and now doth time waste me. I have much to do now, and no time to argue with you about it.”

Will huffed and walked over to the desk. He set his hands on it and stared at Hannibal.

“Are you making me your prisoner, then?” he asked, “because I was under the impression you meant to give me my freedom.”

Hannibal’s head snapped up from what he had busily been doing, and he met Will’s gaze with his own full of fire.

“Do what you will, but I am telling you now, regardless of whether you choose to return to that literal hell of a place, I have every intention of burning it to the ground.”

Will held Hannibal’s gaze for another long moment, searching his expression for some tell or hint of doubt in himself. Hannibal gave him nothing but stern determination, and Will grinned. All the anxiety he had felt building up in him seemed to vanish at the idea of doing something real like this.

“The very instant that I saw you did my heart fly to your service,” Will said, “If you will not murder me for my love, let me be your servant. I’ll help you in any way I can.”

Hannibal sighed in relief, grinning to match Will’s expression.

“Thou art a votary to fond desire.”

Chapter End Notes

That's the end of this part. The next part of the story is going to be a fic by the title Twelfth Night. I'll post the first chapter on the 20th, on schedule. I hope you enjoyed the journey, and that you'll continue to enjoy it through the next installment.

Quotes are from:
"There's not one wise man among twenty that will praise himself" -Much Ado About Nothing
"He wears his faith but as the fashion of his hat" -Much Ado About Nothing
"The offense is not of such a bloody nature" -Twelfth Night
"All hearts in love use their own tongues" -Much Ado About Nothing
"Tell me where is fancy bred, in the heart or in the head?" -The Merchant of Venice
"Our doubts are traitors, and make us lose the good we oft might win by fearing an attempt" -Measure for Measure
"Reason and love keep little company together nowadays" -Midsummer Night's Dream
"Human misery must somewhere have a stop" -Euripides
"The worst fault you have is to be in love" -As You Like It
"Come what may, I adore thee so that danger may seem sport, and I will go" -Twelfth Night
"All deities reside in the human breast" -William Blake
"Wilt thou reach stars because they shine on thee?" -Two Gentlemen of Verona
"At first I did adore a twinkling star but now I worship a celestial sun" -Two Gentlemen of Verona
"I'll find a day to massacre them all and raze their faction and their family" -Titus of Andronicus
"I know my price, I am worth no worse a place" -Othello
"When you depart from me sorrow abides and happiness takes his leave" -Much Ado About Nothing
"The miserable have no other medicine but only hope. I've hope to live, and am prepared to die" -Measure for Measure
"All that lives must die, passing through nature into eternity" -Hamlet
"You speak an infinite deal of nothing" -The Merchant of Venice
"Give me the daggers, the sleeping and the dead are but as pictures" -Macbeth
"I wasted time, and now doth time waste me" -Hamlet
"The very instant that I saw you did my heart fly to your service" -The Tempest
"If you will not murder me for my love, let me be your servant" -Twelfth Night
"Thou art a votary to fond desire" -Two Gentlemen of Verona

Now, to be clear, I may have made a mistake somewhere in citing the quotes. I apologize, but best double check before using one of these quotes yourself and using this as reference. Just a warning. <3

End Notes

I've never written a fic as part of a series, but I had an idea for a fic and then realized I wanted to write this as sort of a prologue. Then, decided that I should just write about three and make it a series. So, here I am. We'll see how it goes.

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